

The future of electronic entertainment issue#129
www.edge-online.com
EDGE
PLAYSTATION2 I GAMECUBE I XBOX I PLAYSTATION I GBA
Suzuki, Naka, Nagoshi &
Sega's elite force speaks
Previewed: Transformers A
Siren, Ghosthunter, Broken
Reviewed: Jak II, Homew
Pokémon Pinball, Magica
Tron 2.0, Colin McRae Ra
Making games pt2; William
Collector's Series: Sega Me
SEGA





There was a lot of talk of transition at both GDCE and the inaugural Edinburgh International Games Festival. Development studios and publishers are already turning their thoughts to the next round of hardware and the inevitable upheaval it will bring with it, without any firm date for the introduction of PlayStation3 or the successors to Xbox and GameCube. But even before the new platforms arrive, this industry seems to find itself undergoing a period of turbulence. It seems like there's a new developer going to the wall every month, and Nintendo's bedraggled stand at ECTS was a worrying image of an industry veteran still playing by old rules and struggling to keep up.

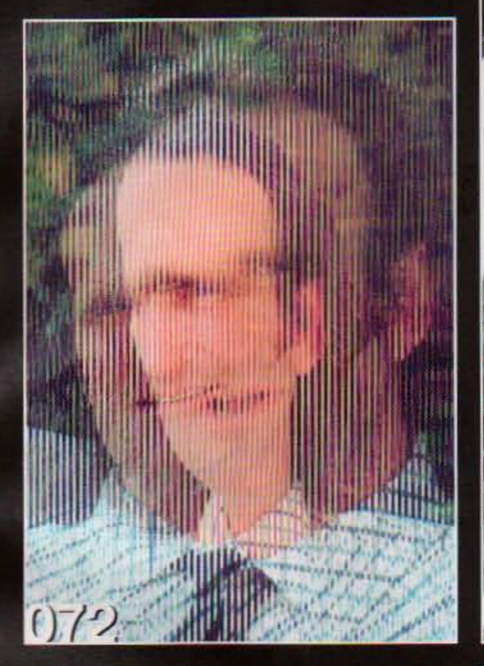
Nintendo isn't alone. The most obvious recent high profile casualty of the videogame industry's disregard for reputation was the company's erstwhile console competitor, Sega. Since the demise of the Dreamcast, Sega has been rather modestly preoccupied with adapting to its new multiformat reality. It has managed to produce moments of indisputable creative brilliance such as *Rez* and *Super Monkey Ball*, without ever really delivering the commercial blockbusters that every publisher needs for financial sustenance.

As **Edge** revisits the company, it finds an organisation attempting to redefine again, endeavouring to maintain the quality that's made it the hardcore choice, but reaching out to the massmarket gamers that companies like Electronic Arts apparently so effortlessly attract. But before the next wave of hardware is introduced, surely the industry actually needs to work out exactly how much anyone knows about reaching out to the massmarket anyway. Therefore in this issue, **Edge** looks at *Erotic Photo Hunt* in the interests of the common good. And rather enjoys itself.





Features



048



080

Future Publishing is part of The Future Network plc.

The Future Network produces carefully targeted specialist magazines for people who share a passion. We aim to satisfy that passion by creating titles offering value for money, reliable information, smart buying advice and which are a pleasure to read. Today we publish more than 90 magazines in the UK, US, France and Italy. Over 80 international editions of our magazines are also published in 28 other countries across the world.

The Future Network plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FNET)

Telephone +44 (0)1225 442244
www.thefuturenetwork.plc.uk





Bath London **Milan** New York **Paris** San Francisco



Printed in the UK



ABC 27,315
January-June 2003
(Audit Bureau of Circulation)

Editorial
Future Publishing 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, BA1 2BW
Telephone +44 (0)1225 442244
Fax +44 (0)1225 732275
Email edge@futurenet.co.uk
Edge Website www.edge-online.com

People on Edge
João Diniz-Sanches editor
Darren Phillips art editor
David McCarthy deputy editor
Mark Walbank associate editor
Scott Bradbury production editor
Margaret Robertson writer
Andrew Hind deputy art editor
Christophe Kagotani Tokyo bureau
Ste Curran editor-at-large

Contributors
Ross Atherton, Mr Biffo, Jon Jordan, Pete Lyle, Toshihiro Nagoshi, Simon Parkin, Steven Poole, Neil Randall, RedEye, Tim Rogers, David Spark

Production
Kirsty Bell senior production coordinator
Rose Griffiths production manager
Colin Polis commercial buyer

Circulation
Tom Shaw product manager
Regina Erak circulation manager

Advertising
Clare Williamson head of sales
Liz Dennys advertising manager
Scott Longstaff senior account manager
Andrew Church senior sales executive
Advertising phone 01225 442244

Publishing
James Binns publisher
Tamara Longden promotions manager
Simon Wear international licensing director
Robert Price group publishing director

Subscriptions & distribution
Future Publishing Ltd
FREEPOST BS4900, Somerton TA11 7BR
Telephone 01458 271184
Fax 01458 271146
Email games.subs@futurenet.co.uk

Distributed through the UK newstrade by **Sey**
Distribution, 86 Newman Street, London W1
Telephone 0207 907 6000
Can't find **Edge**? **James Greenwood** 01225

Senior management
Roger Parry non-executive chairman
Greg Ingham chief executive
Colin Morrison chief operating officer & MD,
John Bowman group finance director

directory november

the 'to be this good takes ages' issue



















Regulars

Prescreen

Testscreen

Production of Edge
Hardware: Power Macintosh G3, G4
Software: QuarkXPress, Adobe Photoshop, Macromedia FreeHand, and Microsoft Office **Typography:** (Adobe®) Helvetica Ultra Light, Thin, Light, Roman, **Medium**, **Bold**

Printed in the UK by Southernprint, Poole, Dorset

Future Games: the first choice for gamers
Edge is brought to you by Future Publishing Ltd, the makers of PC Gamer, PlayStation2 Official Magazine-UK, The Official UK PlayStation Magazine, NGC, PSM2, MAX, GamesMaster, PSNext

"Looks like we're shy of one horse."
"No, you brought two too many."

frontend

News and views from e-entertainment's cutting edge







London Games Week needs to learn from Experience

Sony's consumer event adds impetus to ECTS and GDCE, but the leading UK trade show still hasn't quite returned to its former glory





Photography: Martin Thompson

The decision to agglomerate ECTS, GDCE (see p10) and The PlayStation Experience under the London Games Week banner was vindicated by healthy attendances at all three events, which took place at the end of August at London's Earls Court. While the collective branding revived ECTS, it didn't really answer many questions about the long-term future of the trade show; although the big names were back, it was still a smaller-scale event than it was during its heyday – apparently occupying even less floor space than even recent years. But the real focus has clearly shifted towards the PlayStation Experience, which, like last year, was an unquestionable success, demonstrating the continued dominance of Sony's gaming brand.

As with last year's ECTS, the smaller size of the trade show element allowed an opportunity for the voices of more minor companies to be heard. Once again there was a sizeable contingent of companies offering disc repair services or in-store storage solutions, and independent retailers sat alongside academic institutions on the show floor. The Korean delegation provided the originality and quirkiness with which it has staked its ECTS reputation in recent years demonstrating a motion sensor table tennis game for example, and, in the absence of *Erotica Island* and *Hooligans*, it was up to *Postal* publisher Whiptail Interactive to provide the shock and awe with its band of second-tier glamour models and musclemen.

Also as with last year's show, mobile gaming remained on the periphery of most attendees' interest, in spite of the efforts to attain recognition over the past five years, and in spite of the presence of both Nokia and Vodafone. The N-Gage continues to provoke the ire of dedicated gamers, and the company's stand did little to alter this (though it's worth pointing out that it has yet to really court public opinion in advance of its launch). Vodafone, meanwhile, launched its mobile gaming competition, but its live! Arcade probably went unnoticed by the majority of showgoers.

One new addition was Games Market. Backed by TIGA, this consisted of special meeting rooms set up to allow independent developers to meet with publishers at the show for a fraction of the usual cost of exhibiting. Reports did reach **Edge**'s ears that the organisation of Games Market needs to be improved next year for it to fully justify its inclusion, but it was a welcome addition given the continual run of bad news for independent developers in recent months.

Another novelty was the return of several big name publishers who have shunned ECTS in recent years – though this was largely because their presence was obliged if they wanted to avail of the PlayStation Experience next door. Electronic Arts returned after a six-year absence, for example, showing off a range of sports titles and *Soul Calibur II*. Vivendi's stand, meanwhile, was predictably dominated by queues for the *Half-Life 2* cinema booth, in spite of the

> "In the absence of Erotica Island and *Hooligans*, it was up to Postal publisher Whiptail Interactive to provide glamour models and musclemen"

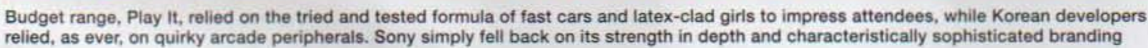












Budget range, Play It, relied on the tried and tested formula of fast cars and latex-clad girls to impress attendees, while Korean developers relied, as ever, on quirky arcade peripherals. Sony simply fell back on its strength in depth and characteristically sophisticated branding

fact that it was merely showing off the E3 demo – unlike Konami, which unveiled a playful new trailer for *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater* as well as featuring a playable version of *Karaoke Revolution*. But though companies such as Midway, THQ and Atari all boasted a substantial presence, the major winner appeared to be Ubisoft, judging by its near clean-sweep at the ECTS Awards on the second day.

"Such was the demand that opportunistic youngsters could be seen hanging round bins trying to procure discarded entry pases"

The real reason for this pronounced publisher presence was the PlayStation Experience, used by Sony to unveil its new 'Fun Anyone?' brand message. After early queues snaked around the entrance to Earls Court, the event went on to sell out over the course of its four days, totting up ticket sales of over 35,000. Such was the demand that opportunistic youngsters could be seen hanging round bins trying to procure discarded entry passes.

The decision to divide this year's event thematically served to reinforce last year's message that this is a platform that has every type of gamer covered, a point underpinned by the number of families in attendance. A dedicated kids' section featured gamepods surrounded by ball-pools, while adult areas came complete with ID checks. A recreation of an *NBA Jam* court and stadium terrace housed the sports sections, while a music and dance area sat next to the *Eye Toy* area and included a soundproof booth for Sony's own karaoke title, *Sing*. Over at the survival horror area, both *Ghosthunter* and *Siren* impressed, while *Soul Calibur II* drew approving gasps from attendees by the beat 'em ups.

The Experience was far from just about the games though. There was also a wide variety of entertainment, freebies and merchandise to highlight the brand's lifestyle associations. The 'Official PlayStation2 Magazine' tournament area returned, for example, joined by a cinema area showing the likes of 'Ocean's Eleven' and 'Monsters Inc.', while a merchandise booth sold sweatbands, t-shirts, bags and stickers designed to adorn the PlayStation2. On the main stage, gaming celebrities like Hideo Kojima were joined by mainstream celebrities like Sinead from Fame Academy (performing a bit of karaoke) and human beatbox, Killa Kela.

If there was one obvious loser in all this, it was Nintendo. Sony's involvement required that Nintendo's own exhibition, outside the entrance to Earls Court, be open to trade visitors only, and not the members of the public that the company sc desperately needs to convince. *Advance Wars 2*, *Mario Kart Double Dash!!* and the GameCube version of *The Legend of Zelda Four Swords* are all undeniably bursting wit quality, but they were largely ignored. Event like London Games Week aren't about the quality of software, but the sophistication of branding and marketing – a fact clearly understood by Sony. The sight of a rain bedraggled, half-empty, palm-tree adorned Nintendo Lorry was a pretty miserable one, but depressingly indicative of the company'

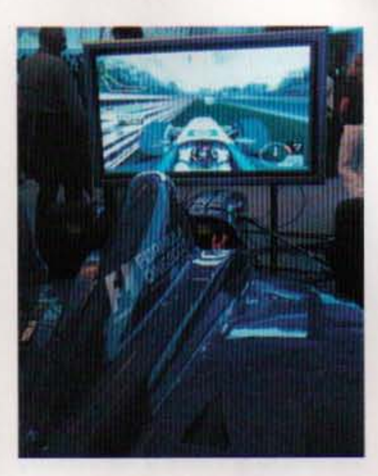






The entrance queue for The PlayStation Experience and the ECTS bar proved the most popular parts of London Games Week. Expect a full report from the latter next issue





ECTS Awards

The winners of the annual ECTS awards were announced on the second day of the trade show, hosted by BBC technology reporter, Kate Russell:

Voted for by visitors to the ECTS website:

Best Console of the Year:
Xbox (Sony)
Best Publisher of the Year:
Nintendo
Best PC Hardware of the Year:
ATI 9800 Pro

Game of the Show Awards, voted for by a press panel:

Overall Best Game of the Show:
XIII (Ubisoft)
PC Game of the Show:
Far Cry (Ubisoft)
Console Game of the Show:
XIII (Ubisoft)
Handheld Game of the Show:
Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising (Nintendo)
Online Game of the Show:
EverQuest II (Ubisoft)
The London Games Week Award:
Half-Life 2 (Vivendi Universal)

Sponsored Awards:

The Edge Award:
Viewtiful Joe (Capcom)
'PC Gamer' Best PC Games Developer Award:
The Creative Assembly
'PC Format' Best New Games Kit Award:
Shuttle's Small Form Factor PCs
The 'Loaded' Award:
GTA: Vice City (Rockstar Games)
'The Times' Award:
EyeToy: Play (Sony)







inability to effectively market its console to a new generation of gamers, in spite of its undoubted software strength.

Microsoft's decision to stay away consequently seemed to be justified, but with the reach of the Experience expanded on Saturday, when Channel 4's 'Popworld' programme aired from Sony's event, Microsoft's forthcoming trade-only X03 also seems destined to be rather limited in its impact compared to Sony's blockbusting and very public brand-building.

But if the future of the PlayStation Experience seems assured, questions once again went unanswered at ECTS. The relative paucity of evening entertainment was as much an indication of waning interest as any, and with London's increasingly decrepit public transport system, alternative events, like the youthful Leipzig Games Convention are beginning to look increasingly attractive to European publishers.

Most worrying was the refusal to countenance the questions that really matter. Although the next hardware transition is imminent, many elements of the videogame industry continue to find themselves in a precarious financial position, exacerbated by the tendency towards generic product and densely packed release schedules. Neither ECTS nor GDCE really addressed the significant structural inadequacies stemming from the way that the cottage-industry practices of a business shaped by bedroom coders have adapted to the financial realities of global entertainment. The future of London Games Week depends on the industry's ability to do so.



Bigben's *Dance: UK* was prominent at ECTS, though over at the Experience, Sony's *Sing* was more prominent. Edge managed to hold itself back in a bid not to embarrass the queuing youngsters

Edge wins GDCE's 'Are You Game?' panel

And in less important news, the rest of the conference was dominated by discussion of the next hardware transition

Also included under the London Games Week umbrella, this year's Game Developers Conference Europe (GDCE) was unsurprisingly preoccupied with the imminent transition to new hardware platforms. Though the likes of PlayStation3 and Xbox2 are still some way off, a lot of independent developers are finding it difficult to cope after the last hardware transition, and this year's conference provided a useful opportunity to get to grips with the technical and logistical difficulties that they'll face in the future. The conference was also characterised by young faces, due to the inclusion of the IGDA Academic Summit for the second year running, and was prefaced by a variety of workshops and a well-subscribed mobile development day.

"The 'Developer Deathmatch' saw Gary Penn savage Peter Molyneux for failing to include any 'entertaining formal challenges' in his games"

Aside from tutorials by the likes of nVidia, Intel, and the Xbox Advanced Technology Group, the first day of GDCE, Tuesday August 26, was dominated by the Mobile Day. This, too, incorporated tutorial sessions, aimed at getting developers up to speed with sponsor Nokia's Series 60 handsets. But the real substance was a series of lectures and discussions that covered various aspects of developing games for mobile handsets, which took place in a room resplendently decked out in Nokia branding (featuring such snappy but compelling slogans as, "Over 10 million Series 60 devices on the market by the end of 2003").

GDCE proper, however, commenced the next day, with the opening sessions setting the tone for those that followed in terms of quality and content. 'Preparing for the transition to the next generation' saw a panel chaired by Frontier's David Braben identify a lot of the problems that new hardware will bring without offering any



The Penn vs Molyneux deathmatch was another of the conference high points

concrete solutions. While there seems to be increasing unanimity that a pronounced preproduction phase is essential, for example (as recommended by Mark Cerny during last year's keynote), there weren't any satisfying answers to the funding problems raised by such a model – although outsourcing and increasing reliance on a contract-based workforce were both mentioned. Still, identifying problems is the first step to finding their solutions, so it was also useful that Criterion's David Lau-Kee and Argonaut's Jez San raised the logistical difficulties posed by scaling up development for new hardware, and the need to create toolsets to facilitate this.

The panel was followed by a keynote speech from Naughty Dog's Jason Rubin, which will have been familiar to anyone who attended GDC earlier in the year. The main thrust of Rubin's talk was that graphics have, up till now, been a significant driver in the sales of videogame software thanks to the exponential increases in graphical quality brought about by new hardware. But with these increases levelling out, developers intending to create blockbusting successes will, according to Rubin, either have to innovate or attach (to a film licence, for example). It was an interesting talk, though it failed to take into account visual improvement through the adoption of new styles, and contrasted with the conclusions drawn by Seamus Blackley at EIGF the previous week (see p12) in which he highlighted the low revenue return on licensed videogames.

The themes of transition raised by these first two keynotes predominated throughout the rest of the panels and lectures over the next couple of days, but topics varied enormously, ranging from Sports Interactive's Miles Jacobson discussing



Edge isn't biased or anything, but GDCE's undoubted highlight was watching **Edge** assert the superiority of its gaming trivia knowledge in the face of competition from industry heavyweights. Nothing to do with the fact that the questions were drawn from the pages of the mag





marketing (revealing the interesting fact that retailers frequently insist publishers take out additional in-store marketing as well as paying to have their games stocked at all) to Microsoft's Laura Fryer who argued in her talk ('It's only a game?') that the industry needs to stop denigrating its medium.

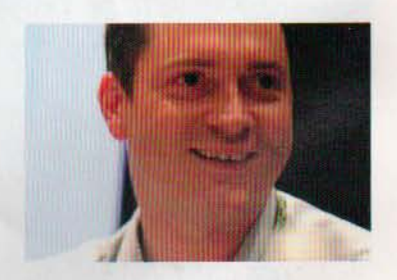
But once again, it was left to Seamus Blackley to point out some unpalatable truths. Indeed the major failing of the conference was that it did little to encompass the difficulties that are currently blighting independent development – particularly in the UK. In the weeks surrounding the conference several further development studios were closed down, with both Attention to Detail and Asylum Entertainment finding themselves in trouble. But the only talk that really touched upon the structural inadequacies behind this recent wave of closures, was Blackley's 'Business as usual'. Covering everything from miscommunication between publishers and developers, through the problem of upfront design, milestone payments and royalty-based funding, to the fundamental failure of developers to truly understand their audience, Blackley was alone in highlighting these deep lying problems. As for solutions, these will need to be found by every component of the videogame supply chain.

Still, if there was an understated air of doom and gloom, it was dispelled by the last couple of sessions. First, there was the 'Developer Deathmatch' between Denki's Gary Penn and Lionhead's Peter Molyneux, which saw no holds barred as Penn savaged Molyneux for failing to include any 'entertaining formal challenges' in his games. Next, there was the 'Are you game?' pub quiz, which saw a panel of industry luminaries including both Penn and Molyneux, as well as Richard Longley, Seamus Blackley, Martin de Ronde, Julien Merceron, Chris van der Kuyl and indeed, **Edge** itself, vying to prove their superior knowledge of videogaming trivia under the watchful eye of Future Publishing's Mike Goldsmith. Obviously **Edge** won (assisted by the fact that almost an entire section was based on the pages of the magazine itself). And although there was one plucky audience member who managed to eclipse **Edge**'s score, and walk off with **Edge**'s *EyeToy* prize, it later emerged Nick Ferguson had colluded with up to two other audience members.

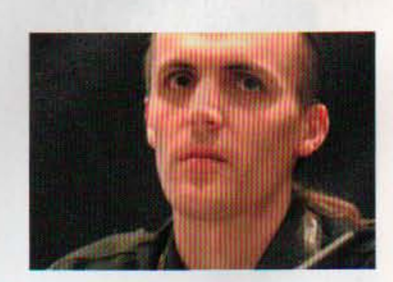


Seamus Blackley was once again the most ebullient speaker, on balance









Some of the well-known faces put to shame by Edge's superior knowledge included (clockwise from top left): Lionhead's Peter Molyneux, Vis Interactive's Chris van der Kuyl, Jeremy Longley of Lost Toys, and Gary Penn of Denki (whose score came the closest)

Videogame industry the winner at inaugural Festival

Edge barely manages to refrain from heckling comedians and having its mind read by mentalists to report from the first Edinburgh International Games Festival



Nintendo's *Metroid Prime* and SCEE's *EyeToy* each walked away with accolades at this year's inaugural Edinburgh International Games Festival (EIGF). At a special awards party held to conclude the event, which ran from August 11-18, *Metroid Prime* scooped the Edinburgh International Games Award for Excellence and Innovation – in association with **Edge**, while *EyeToy* was the recipient of the Games Players Game Award 2003, sponsored by nVidia and voted for by attendees. Another winner at the event was Konami, whose *Pro Evolution* Series was voted the best football videogame ever by a braying, partisan industry crowd at the conference itself.

The Award for Excellence and Innovation was presented to Nintendo's David Gosen by the day's host, football commentator Clive Tyldesley, and was the culmination of several months of videogame playing by a jury panel assembled by **Edge**. Freelance journalist Rhianna Pratchett, Denki's Gary Penn, Jez San OBE, Mike Gamble from THQ, Crash Bandicoot creator Jason Rubin, Rebellion's Jason Kingsley, Lionhead's Pete Hawley, Jeremy Longley of Lost Toys, and EA's Louis Castle nominated a six-strong shortlist from which *Metroid Prime* emerged victorious, consisting of the following games: *Battlefield 1942*, *Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem*, *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, *Ikaruga*, *Metroid Prime*, and *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker*.

Sony's *EyeToy*, represented by SCEE's Ray Maguire wasn't eligible for the Excellence Award, since it was released after the judging process commenced, but won over the audience of 'Go Play Games', the public element of the festival, which proved a sell-out success over its two weeks. The event offered members of the public the opportunity to get their hands on some classic videogame titles across all formats, as well as the first real public unveiling of Nokia's N-Gage

The real meat of the festival though, was the one-day industry conference which took place at the Edinburgh International Conference Centre on Monday, August 18. The success of the event was clear from the size and wide-ranging nature of the audience, as well as the quality of the debate that it stimulated, suggesting that this year's conference is just the start of a fruitful association with the festival. And though Tyldesley might have appeared a rather strange choice as host, he proved excellent value for money.

"EA's star-studded video promoting its next Bond title featured a willing cast of A-list celebrities who will be lending their talents"

The day's events kicked off with a brief introduction, and reaffirmation of the cultural contribution of the videogame industry, by this year's Festival Chair, **Tom Stone** of Lego Interactive. The day's first panel session then followed, featuring a breakdown of the current state of the videogame market by Nick Parker, who also pointed to the evolution of marketing by airing a fascinating array of TV adverts, including one never-before-aired, stomach-churning example from Sony. Other highlights of this panel included Ray Maguire's stated determination to grow Sony's audience by appealing to the two thirds of the population that doesn't currently play games, and David Gosen's assertion that disposable leisure time is becoming as important as disposable income in determining the spending habits of the current generation of gamers.

The afternoon sessions kicked off with a characteristically engaging talk by Capital Entertainment Group's Seamus Blackley – who seems to be alone in his willingness to





Delegates were given the opportunity to network and exchange ideas between sessions during the industry day and during the awards party that followed in the evening









The EA-sponsored 'Hollywood or Bust' session (above) was entertaining enough, but Seamus Blackley (left), Danny Kelly and Clive Tyldesley were the (in some cases surprising) highlights before Edge departed the EICC to go and inexpertly heckle at Late'n'Live (see p18)

avoid the routine self-deception that apparently affects the rest of the industry. The main thrust of his talk was that games are not as culturally or financially significant as they think they are, and he marshalled some impressive figures to prove that the videogame industry is smaller than each of the music, film, television, and book publishing industries. He went on to highlight videogaming's failure to really understand its audience, and rail against various structural inadequacies such as the current reliance on milestones and royalties. His most interesting point, backed up with some fairly conclusive figures, was that original titles earn more revenue than their film-licensed counterparts.

By comparison, the 'Hollywood or Bust' panel might have disappointed were it not for EA's star-studded video promoting its upcoming *Bond* title, featuring a willing (if largely videogame-ignorant) cast of A-list celebrities who will be lending their voice talents to the game – John Cleese, Pierce Brosnan, Heidi Klum and self-professed hardcore gamer, Shannon Elizabeth. The one disappointment was the showing of a clip from *Primal* as an example of how far the cinematic sensibilities of videogames have come – which would have done little to dispel the misconceptions of the non-gamers in the audience.

The ensuing sessions were equally informative, with particular highlights including a video interview with Shigeru Miyamoto during the 'Meet your Makers' session, the *Metal Gear Solid* memories of Harry Gregson-Williams during an excellent session about game audio, and the performance of soccer pundit Danny Kelly as he attempted to recreate the atmosphere of an 18th century bear pit during a lively session that saw Konami's Dave Cox pick up the coveted award for best football game ever.

"I was particularly pleased that the conference programme turned out to be as lively, stimulating and thought-provoking as it did," said Stone after the conference. "I'm already looking forward to next year's event and am confident that the EIGF has already established itself as a key element of the industry calendar." It certainly got off to a good start. The only real improvement that **Edge** would like to see would be a greater willingness to engage with other creative industries in events that are open to the public – to capitalise on Edinburgh's particularly receptive audience.



Free cocktails assisted the conversation at the awards party. Edge had too many

N-Gage readies for launch

Nokia mounts final push before its handheld's October 7 global release

With an emphatic presence at ECTS and a 56-city tour of Europe, Nokia is sparing no effort to convince the public of the N-Gage's worth. **Edge**'s first extended hands-on, however, has revealed it to be competent, well-supported and flawed.

The software line-up is already impressive, and Nokia has recently announced a deal with EA, although no specific titles have been confirmed. Online services will allow for features such as the download of demonstration walkthroughs or ghosts to race against. Spectacular times or moves can be recorded and uploaded as global proof of your brilliance. And **Edge** found Bluetooth multiplayer reliable and relatively speedy to set up. It certainly beats a spider-web of GBA link-up cables.

Unfortunately, the software provided to **Edge** was a significant way off being finished code. More fortunately, this means that there should have been time to correct the shortcomings that were evident – mainly a lack of music, unreliable framerates, twitchy handling and unintuitive menus.

The choice of a portrait screen is still baffling – barring the unlikely event of a port of *Ikaruga*. *MotoGP* sits very happily on it, but *Pandemonium* becomes far harder than the original, since you get less notice of enemies or gaps. The 'rocker'-style D-pad is accurate and satisfying. A central click works as a separate button, and for once it is possible to use it without squidging the pad in all sorts of unwanted directions.

Nor do the gaming capabilities compromise its other functions. Games pause automatically when a call comes in, and MP3 playback is of a high quality.

Ultimately though, none of this matters. In order to change the game in your N-Gage, you must power down the phone, slide off the back cover, remove the battery and then replace the game card. It's a fiddly procedure, and it makes a mockery of N-Gage's vision of smart-casual professionals amiably blue-toothing with strangers on the way to work.



It's a messy sight; **Edge** finds it bizarre (and worrying) that it ever made it from a brain-storming sketchpad into production

Confirmed Game Line-up

2003
Tomb Raider
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater
MotoGP
Marcel Desailly's Pro Soccer
Pandemonium
Red Faction
SonicN
Super Monkey Ball
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell
Virtua Tennis
Rayman 3
Puyo Pop
Puzzle Bobble Vs
Taito Memories

2004
Sega Rally 2004
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon

Through the Games Window

The next version of Microsoft Windows is being designed to make gaming as easy as possible





These very early screens give some idea of what Microsoft's new operating system might look like

Although Microsoft's next-generation operating system, codenamed Longhorn, isn't due for release until at least 2005, the software giant is already heavily pushing its advantages. "The PC will be the dominant games platform for the next couple of years and at Microsoft we're going to keep investing in gaming R&D," explains **Dean Lester**, general manager, Windows graphics and gaming technologies, during ECTS. "Games are a critical part of the Windows platform. They help drive people to upgrade their OS, and this will be a big deal for Longhorn."

Key aspects of Longhorn in this regard include a new user interface which will take full advantage of the 3D graphics hardware found in most new PCs. Instead of the desktop being a single graphics surface, in Longhorn it will be dynamically composed, enabling features such as translucency and animations on a per-window basis. For this reason, the minimum spec for a Longhorn PC will be DirectX 7-style 3D hardware with 32MB of video RAM and AGP4X, while the recommended spec will be DX9-class hardware with 128MB of VRAM.

Another part of Longhorn will be the new driver model, designed to improve both stability and ease of use by only allowing use of Microsoft-validated drivers. Similar programs are in place to improve technical issues such as patching and game installation. "Certainly for simple games you should be able to run them direct from the DVD drive or have a silent install when you can put the disk in your PC and start playing immediately, while the game installs in the background," Lester says. "Fundamentally we want to make playing a PC game as easy as playing a console game."

Other issues being investigated in this regard include defining a simple rating system for deciding whether a game will work on a PC, as well as the standardisation of controller design – itself the reason for Microsoft's unexpected recent withdrawal from the production of joysticks and controllers.

"The combination of keyboard and mouse is great from some games but it doesn't work for driving and sports games," Lester reveals. "We're thinking about how we can make the experience better. PC controllers need to be as standardised as on the console." More Longhorn details will be released at Microsoft's Professional Developer Conference in October.



Microsoft took advantage of ECTS to start evangelising the benefits of Longhorn to the development community

IBM gears up for games

Big Blue's low key approach at ECTS belies big ambition to make 2004 the year it shakes up the videogame sector

The company's presence at ECTS was confined to a single, smallish, meeting room, but IBM was holding meetings to reveal its large ambitions for growth in the videogame space over the next couple of years. Having identified a market opportunity by conducting substantial research last year, the company is building up to enter the market fully in 2004, using 2003 as a 'seeding year' to refine its strategy. And although that strategy is still partly under wraps, **Jørgen Slings**, the company's business development executive for gaming, was prepared to share a few details with **Edge**.

The main thrust of the company's renewed interest in the games sector is one of infrastructure provision. "As a game developer, focus on what you are good at; creating compelling games," argues Slings. "Leave the infrastructure to IBM." Consequently, the company intends to leverage its existing relationships with development tool partners, such as Discreet, AliasWaveFront, Avid, Softimage and nVidia, in order to assist developers. In addition to offering a range of hardware, such as scalable servers, storage products, and workstations, the company also plans to launch a Games Laboratory in France towards the end of this year, that will be used by IBM's own gaming team and development partners to test drive their games.

Slings is keen to point out that the company's strategy will be platform agnostic, but there's a particular emphasis on assisting in the development of online game infrastructures. The company also plans to offer a range of services such as the use of its WebSphere Portal Server for hosting online games and the use of its grid computing systems (recently tested by a group of students from the University of Wisconsin, who developed a derivative of IBM's OptimalGrid called GameGrid that allowed 80 players to participate simultaneously on a single *Quake II* map).

Perhaps the company's most interesting videogame project is the IBM Business Integration for Games project. According to Slings, this will provide "a unifying API to access intelligent e-business infrastructure from the game environment." Essentially this means that revenue transactions can take place ingame, raising the prospect, via revenue sharing, of new business models for developers of online titles.

IBM®

IBM's decision to enter the videogame market follows intensive research into the market opportunity, and the company is convinced that it can build a reputation as a videogame infrastructure provider – particularly in the online area, though its aim is platform agnostic

Recently Reviewed

Edge brings you a rundown of last issue's review scores

Title	Platform	Publisher	Developer	Score
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	Xbox/PC	LucasArts	BioWare	9
Winning Eleven 7	PS2	Konami	In-house	9
Boktai	GBA	Konami	In-house	8
F-Zero GX	GC	Nintendo	Amusement Vision	8
R-Type Final	PS2	SCEJ	Irem	8
Downhill Domination	PS2	SCEA	Incog	6
Freedom Fighters	PS2/Xbox/GC/PC	Electronic Arts	IO Interactive	6
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	GC	Nintendo	Camelot	6
Republic: The Revolution	PC	Eidos Interactive	Elixir Studios	6
Group S Challenge	Xbox	Capcom	In-house	5
Space Channel 5: Ulala's Cosmic Attack	GBA	Atari	UGA/3d6	5
Star Wars: Galaxies – An Empire Divided	PC	Sony Online Entertainment	In-house	5
The Italian Job: LA Heist	PS2/GC/Xbox	Eidos Interactive	Climax	5



Knights of the Old Republic





Winning Eleven 7



Boktai



F-Zero GX

CUTTINGS



Xbox gets Grand Theft Auto

A soon to be released *Grand Theft Auto* Double Pack is to give Xbox gamers their first taste of Rockstar's blockbusting videogame phenomenon. The pack consists of *Grand Theft Auto III* and *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* bundled together for either Xbox or PlayStation2 and follows months of speculation after Take 2 CEO Jeff Lapin revealed that a Rockstar Xbox title was on the way back in June. It is reported to have been made possible by the relaxing of an exclusivity deal that prevented the series appearing on any console other than PlayStation2 – raising the possibility of another PlayStation2-exclusive *GTA* title in the near future. Lest Xbox owners get too excited though, the PS2 version of the pack will be released about a week in advance of the Xbox version.

Kaboom goes Kaboom

The latest UK developer to find itself in financial difficulties is Kaboom Studios, which was recently placed into administrative receivership. Consequently, two of the group's studios, ATD and Silicon Dreams, have been closed, while a third, *Conflict: Desert Storm* developer Pivotal, has been put up for sale. The studio closures have resulted in the layoffs of over 100 employees, and while Pivotal is expected to be unaffected, the news is further bad news for the UK's independent development scene, which has been hit by a spate of closures and profits warnings in recent months.

Sports Interactive and Eidos part company

In a surprising move, Eidos Interactive and Sports Interactive have announced that they are to part ways. The publisher and developer of the *Championship Manager* series have agreed to produce one final title together before moving on, with Eidos retaining the *Championship Manager* brand and Sports Interactive keeping hold of its player database and source code. *Championship Manager: Season 2003/2004* will be the last title that the two companies will collaborate on after what both parties are calling a mutual decision. Eidos intends to release an update for the 2004/2005 football season, though Sports Interactive has yet to announce its own plans.

www.xgamestation.com

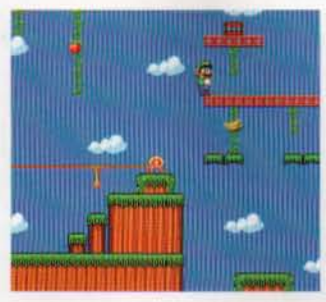
My little console

Forget vector unit microcode, vertex shaders and single-transistor SRAM, the latest console on the block is powered by a 16bit CPU and can be programmed in BASIC

Considering the billions of dollars required to bring a game console to market, more than a few people were surprised when programming guru **Andre LaMothe** announced that he was planning to release a new system for Christmas 2003. But before Sony, Microsoft and Nintendo get too worried, as the tongue-in-cheek name of his console, XGameStation, suggests, LaMothe isn't looking for world domination. Instead the author of around 40 game programming books starting with 1994's 'Tricks of the Game Programming Gurus', is attempting to do what Sony kicked off with its PlayStation2 YaBasic project – get people interested in programming consoles.

"My goal is to write a book about making your own videogame system from the ground up; build it, program it, and plug it in and play. This is what I was looking for when I was ten years old," explains LaMothe, who is currently tweaking XGameStation's final hardware specifications, even down to designing a custom 2D hardware-acceleration chip, in order to hit his target of a $100–150 pricepoint.

"It would have been so easy to grab a RISC processor and a GPU from some manufacturer and have a 250MIP hardware-accelerated system, but my main concern is that I can actually explain how it works and people will understand and be able to mod it," he says.



Using a home-built assembler and emulator, this Luigi demo shows the sort of graphical power users of XGameStation should expect. The emulated demo draws the screen using 16bit tile-based graphics with a sprite foreground. PlayStation2 it ain't but it doesn't look bad for a £65 machine that can be programmed in BASIC



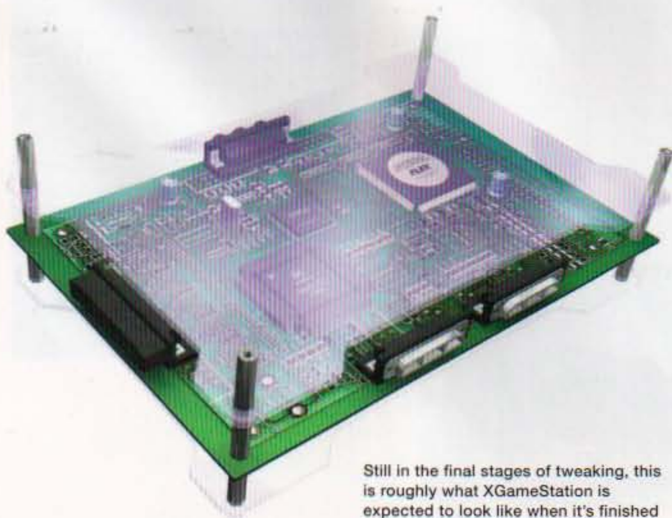
One thing it obviously won't have is a lot of power under the hood. For inspiration LaMothe has looked at the architecture of game systems such as the C64, Atari 800 and Apple II, with final performance expected to be in the same order as Nintendo's SNES.

"My rule of design for XGameStation is if the reader can't understand each part of the design then it shouldn't be in there," says LaMothe. "I want the users to learn how to write really tight, small code, understand of all aspects of computer systems from the electron to the phosphor on the screen and get a feeling of accomplishment knowing something from A–Z. It's very relaxing programming simple 8/16bit systems where you know what's going on. I have no idea what happens when I type, 'CreateWindowEx' in Windows."

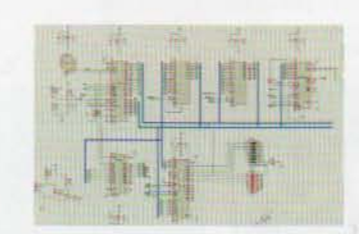
The current component list for XGameStation includes: a 16bit Motorola 25MHz 68HCS12 CPU; sockets for additional processors including a 16bit high-speed 6502 and a Z80 derivative; one reprogrammable 64k-block game cartridge; serial I/O supporting PlayStation controllers as well as PS2 keyboards; tile/sprite-based graphics with NTSC and PAL output; four-channel FM sound synthesis; a built-in version of the BASIC programming language; and support via the SDK for C and assembly language.

It will also ship with a CD-based manual explaining how it all works, although LaMothe foresees two distinct user groups. "It's designed so the newbies will be able to plug it into the TV and learn how to make games using BASIC, while the serious hackers can read the manual more fully and learn about stuff like timing diagrams, NTSC video output and computer architecture," he says.

Various plug-in hardware modules are planned, enabling more advanced users to up the power of their systems, and tentative designs for XGS2 and 3 are being sketched out should the first release prove to be a success. When released XGameStation will be available through online distributors such as Amazon and Lik-Sang as well as on the XGameStation website.



Still in the final stages of tweaking, this is roughly what XGameStation is expected to look like when it's finished



Although designed to help entry-level programmers, XGameStation should also prove a challenge for hackers who want to delve a bit deeper into the system architecture

www.gameshadow.com

Fixing the breaks

Patches are the bane of PC gaming but Aardwork's GameShadow centralised patching service promises a simple and cheap fix to the problem

If developers did their jobs properly there would be little use for GameShadow. But sadly, or happily depending on your point of view, the need for the newly launched service has never been greater. "One developer, who shall remain nameless, has just released a game patch that was over 100Mb," laughs **Tony Treadwell**, the jovial CEO of Aardworks, the company behind GameShadow. "That's not a patch, that's a brand new game." There is a more positive need for patches though: support for games whose lifespan is enhanced, particularly by online play. There are over 20 patches available for *Tribes*, for example. This can generate a huge array of compatibility problems for players however.

"One instance where GameShadow works really well, is if friends are trying to play an online game together but have different versions of the game installed," Treadwell explains. "Using GameShadow, it's easy to get everyone to the same version." Another good example is when players give up on a game because of critical bugs, which make it impossible to continue.

This is where GameShadow comes into play. Trying to keep track of all the available patches for your PC games can be a full-time job, both in terms of knowing what's available as well as trying to get hold of it. For an annual subscription fee of £20, GameShadow promises to take away the hassle, thanks to its centralised, pro-active service.

Download and install the 8Mb GameShadow client, and the software will check your PC and provide a list of the games installed and their current versions. It will then scan the GameShadow database, which currently supports around 600 games via 11Gb of patches, and provide a list of patches available for download via your internet connection, whether broadband or dial-up.

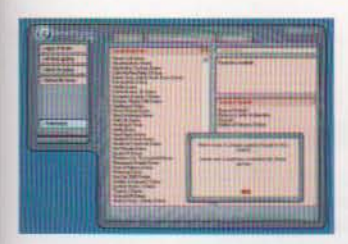
"I think there are two key groups of people who will use GameShadow," says Treadwell. "There's the hardcore who have so many games, it's impossible for them to keep on top of the situation, and there's those casual gamers who don't even know what patches are." Of course, Treadwell admits that many in the first category will take the attitude that they can cope very well by themselves. "That's fine," he says. "If you want to sit in a queue on FileShack or another of those sites, that's up to you. We're trying to speed up the process." And it's not just about speed either. Neat additions to the service include an alerting feature which informs subscribers when new patches are released, as well as the ability to patch games over a LAN; crucial for gaming cafés and the like.

Currently undergoing a soft launch in the UK – evaluation copies of GameShadow, which are five-patch or 14-day limited, can be downloaded now and are also being covermounted on PC magazines – the next big step for Aardwork is the US market. "The nice thing about the technology is that we can franchise it," Treadwell says. Indeed, a two-year deal just signed with US game hosting concern GameSpy, will see a co-branded version of GameShadow marketed to GameSpy's 18m registered users. "The beauty for companies hosting patches on their servers is that they have the backend set up. All we need to do is snap a branded user interface onto the client and make sure the URLs are pointing to the correct places."

Other items on the to-be-done list include expanding the service to handle files associated with gaming such as graphics and soundcard drivers. "Yeah, we've got a big queue of stuff to be done," says Treadwell.

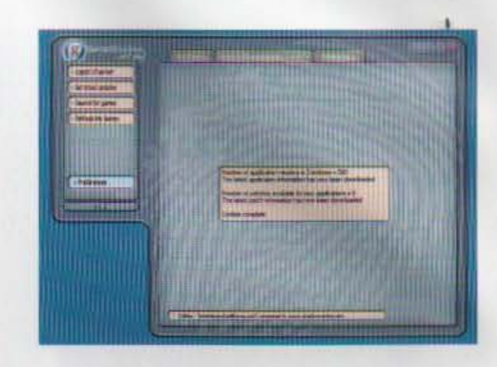


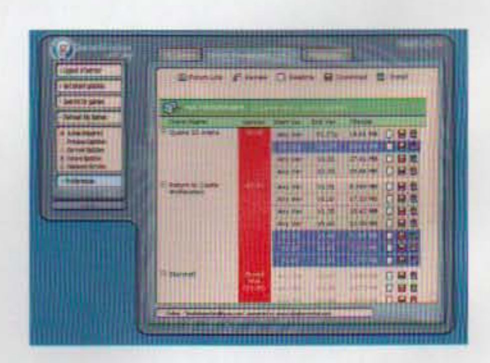
Log onto GameShadow and the first thing you see is the news screen of latest games supported and latest patches released (above). Around 600 PC games are currently supported under GameShadow, with more being added weekly





After logging into GameShadow, the software scans your hard drive to detect what games are installed, before providing a list of available patches







Using the version management console, the version state of each of your installed games is detected, as well as a complete list of the patches, their size and a readme file concerning their functionality

OUT THERE

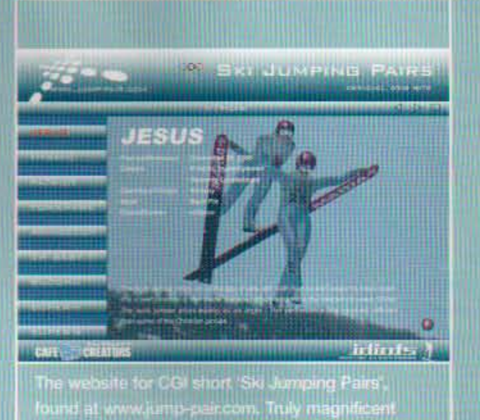
REPORTAGE


The EIGF closing party, where **Edge** drank cocktails and gave an award to *Metroid Prime*. In that order

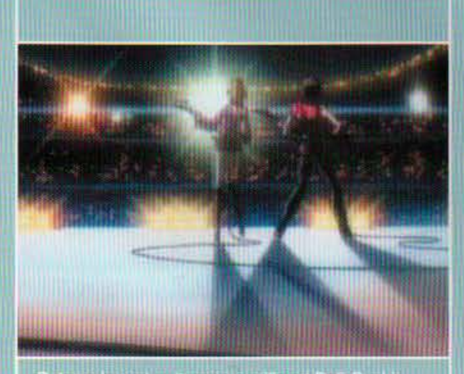


Howard Read's Little Howard. **Edge** wanted a picture of H-Bot, but he's not returning our emails





The website for CGI short 'Ski Jumping Pairs', found at www.jump-pair.com. Truly magnificent


But maybe not quite as magnificent Daft Punk's 'Interstella 5555: The Story of the Secret Star System'


"Forget LOTR 3: Orgasm. Leiji Matsumoto's work is the real Return of the King!" said Edge magazine

01 Edge's Edinburgh Adventures

UK: As avid Frontend fans will know by now, the first Edinburgh International Games festival saw a decent proportion of the London-centric industry disappear to the Scottish capital for a three day conference. But as entertaining and informative as the EIGF was, Out There chose to throw its cultural net a little wider and indulge in some of the other geek-related delights the festival had to offer. Like the film festival, which showed anime hero Leiji Matsumoto's Interstella 5555: The 5tory of the 5ecret 5tar 5ystem, a brilliant visual score to Daft Punk's 'Discovery' album. And 'Ski Jumping Pairs', a superb piece of CGI by Japanese design group, Idiots.

But the Edinburgh Festival is really famous for its comedy, and it would have been remiss of **Edge** not to make the magazine's presence felt there. Warming **Edge** up was Perrier-nominated Howard Read, whose routine hinges on interaction between him and his computer-generated creations. **Edge**'s favourite was H-Bot 2000, a stand-up comic – from the future! – that fills the inevitable silence after each of its dreadful one-liners with an enthusiastic drawn-out "Woo!". "Anyone want to heckle him?" asked Howard. "You're shit!" shouted **Edge**. "You're a c***!" replied the robot, instantly. "Wooooooooooooooooo!" Touché!

High on heckling success, **Edge**'s next adventure took it to a tiny, near-empty, cabaret club, accompanied by 20 or so other games festival refugees. Under impromptu shouty-questioning from **Edge**, the final comic claimed he preferred the Xbox to the GameCube. "Ha!" the magazine replied, "You've just embarrassed yourself, because David Gosen's here," producing an awkward silence Shazia Mirza would have been proud of. "Thank you, **Edge**, for the Nintendo-related heckling," the tired MC announced at the end of the evening – possibly with some trace of sarcasm. But it still wasn't enough to end the magazine's boisterous interaction. The following day, at Late'n'Live, **Edge** took up Daniel Kitson's heckling challenge. "What's your favourite videogame?" shouted the magazine, confidently. An awkward pause. "Hmm. Not a traditional heckle," replied Kitson. "More of a question. But seeing as you asked, *Metal Gear Solid 2*." Ah. Ok. Thanks.

Soundbytes

"Now that so many of the technological problems of computer gaming have been solved, the next big frontier is narrative, which is where someone like me can come in and have fun. It's really exciting to see the technology develop to the point where we can now talk about plot, drama, characterization, emotion, and consequence in games. As a writer and creator of imaginary worlds, this is the field I'm fascinated by, and I plan to spend a lot more time writing for games"
Comic book creator and author Grant Morrison on his shift from the ninth art to the tenth

"I know Edge – he and I go way back"
A homeless gentlemen tries to talk his way into **Edge**'s Tenth Anniversary party in London

02 Videogames To Get Even More Geeky

US: About 18 months ago, **Edge** and a few of its closest friends decided to try their hand at a spot of roleplaying. No, not like *that* – the Chun Li costume still has stains from the last time – but proper, old-skool pen-and-paper dungeoneering, like all those BioWare PC RPGs but without the blue screens. It was OK, but **Edge**'s half-elf couldn't help but wonder why, after putting all its points in charisma, it couldn't just ask people *nicely* for their treasure. And then sleep with them. Anyway, while the bludgeoning subtleties of D&D combat were slightly lost on parts of the **Edge** entity, something a little closer to home might tempt the magazine back to the polyhedral dice. Capcom has lent its intellectual property to Living Room Games for a series of tabletop RPGs based on *Street Fighter*, *Darkstalkers*, *Final Fight* and *Rival Schools*. While no titles have actually been announced, the first two games will be out in time for *Street Fighter*'s 15th anniversary, indicating that **Edge** will be trying to fiddle rolls against Dragon Punches relatively soon.

03 Suing, Take 2

US: Poor Take 2. First it gets word that a wrestler's none too happy with *Max Payne*'s name (see Out There, **E**128), and then another intellectual property writ arrives on its doorstep. Christopher Ellis – a graffiti artist better known as 'Daze' – alleges that Rockstar took his work without his consent and reproduced it in *Grand Theft Auto*. Now, **Edge** hasn't seen Daze's work in the game, but considers it possible the developer was just trying to *parody* his art. After all, that's what it was trying to do with 'ERSE' magazine, the poncy videogame publication found on a table in a building in *Vice City*, isn't it? 'Course, if Mr Ellis wins out, then **Edge** expects a healthy settlement too. Thanks!

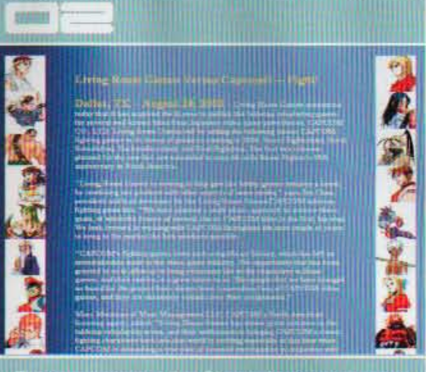
04 Has anyone seen our talcum powder?

UK: It's a rare night out with **Edge** that *doesn't* climax with bloodied lycra, and so it was on the evening of September 10 that the magazine lived up to reputation and accompanied Eidos to London's Scala for some Backyard Wrestling. The ultra-violent night out, starring ludicrous luminaries like MDogg20 and Madman Pondon was arranged to promote the upcoming videogame, cleverly titled *Backyard Wrestling*. **Edge** managed to set its opponent on fire, slam them from a treehouse, and then hit them with all manner of nasty looking objects. And in the game, too! No, but seriously, folks, the real-world action culminated with one of the wrestlers being spanked with a racquet and then having a dollar stapled to his forehead, also a sign of a great night, **Edge** proposes. Next time, the magazine will remember to bring its *Viewtiful Joe* outfit. Then there'll be trouble. Oh yes.

Data Stream Featherweight Champ Special

N-Gage dimensions: 133.7 x 69.7 x 20.2 mm
GBA SP dimensions: 84.6 x 82 x 24.3 mm
N-Gage battery life: 3-6hrs (depending on the game)
GBA SP battery life: 10 hours
N-Gage resolution: 176x208
GBA SP resolution: 240x160
N-Gage screen size: 35x41.5mm
GBA SP screen size: 61.2x40.8mm

02



The announcement that Capcom's games are moving to the tabletop. Edge can't wait for *SFII*



Of course, if it's like the game, everyone'll be Ryu, and one person will claim they've played as M Bison

03



'ERSE'? It's OK, Edge can take a joke. They're those things that other mags use to fill up space, right?



Here, let's try one. "*Grand Theft Auto* is shit! NOT! It's wicked! We cacked our pants it's so good, etc"

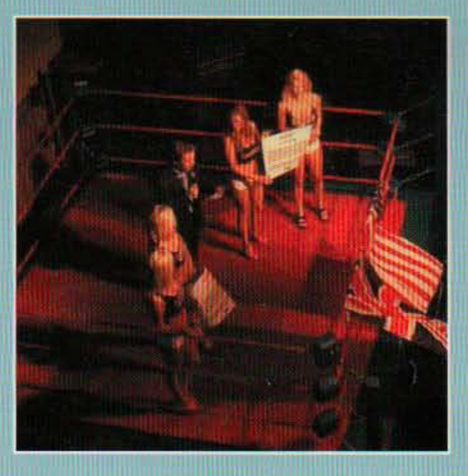


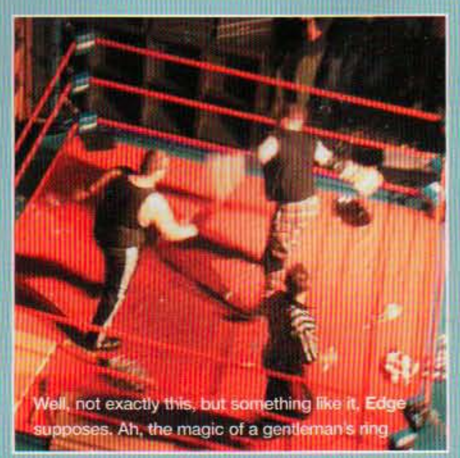
Daze's work. Edge can't see the plagiarism itself – this looks far better than GTA. Just kidding! Ahem

04

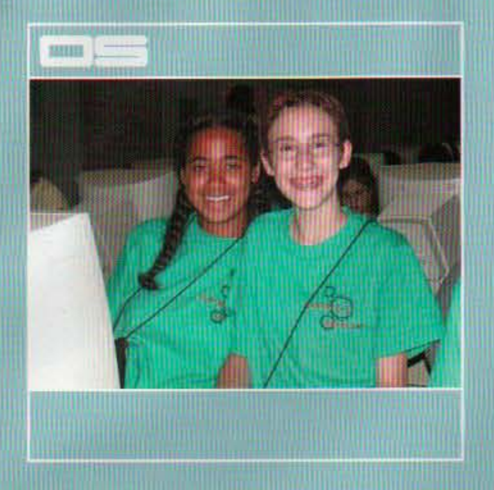


One man bends over, while another holds a racquet. Now, come on sport fans: what happens next?





Well, not exactly this, but something like it, Edge supposes. Ah, the magic of a gentleman's ring





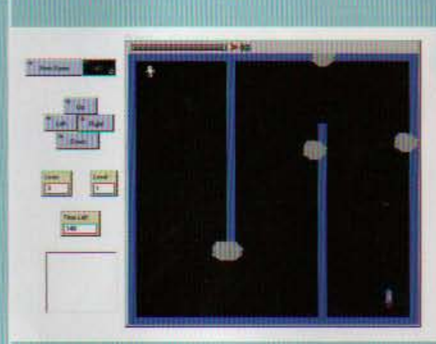
A snapshot from GAMES camp, where a young supergirl considers a future in HTML design

Exclusive! New HP Game Revealed

US: Imagine you're a young girl, and you've just been told you're being sent to camp. Imagine the fear that it might be something terrible; imagine the elation when you find out it's GAMES camp. Then imagine the disappointment when you see GAMES stands for Girls' Adventures in Mathematics, Engineering, and Science. Then imagine getting there and finding out you're going to learn how to make videogames! Crikey, isn't being a kid confusing enough without all this double-bluff acronym-based wordplay? Anyway, the eight and ninth-grade attendees at the University of Illinois Summer School managed to produce several NetLogo based games by the end of the crash course, and they're far beyond anything **Edge** could have managed at that age. Indeed, one, *Harry Potter and the Mystic Maze* demonstrates a fine grasp of one of game design's most timeless tenets: hiding a rudimentary game dynamic behind expensive IP. Good show, ladies. See all the projects here: www.wie.uiuc.edu/games



One of the games, in which a shark eats minnows. Think *Ecco*, but with Rockstar-style violence



An astronaut makes his way to his rocket. Think *Pikmin*, crossed with *Asteroids*, on a 2600

Alien Creation

UK: Another day, another homebrew development competition. This one, though, being sponsored by PC boutique Alienware, has a smart enough prize to get all but the laziest one-man-devcos coding – an Aurora system, which is an XP3000 with a Radeon Pro and other such good stuff **Edge** only pretends to understand, and copies of Dark Basic, Cartography Shop 3, 3D Canvas Pro, and Texture Maker. The game must be produced with Dark Basic, but since a special 90-day trial version of the game creation software is available that shouldn't prove a problem. Time's not exactly pressing, either; entries have to be in by November 30, and the only limits are that the game must be under 10Mb in size, and feature a special 3D animated alien model designed around Alienware's logo by The Game Creators. Oh, and your imagination, of course – but if you're lacking that, **Edge** suggests a management game where Aliens have to put out a market-leading magazine on time and under budget every month. Kind of like Sensible's *Sex, Drugs, & Rock'n'Roll*, only with words and aliens and none of the perks. Good luck! Competition details are at www.thegamecreators.com/alienwarecomp



Alien textures. A clever person could put them on a model, and win themselves a super-shiny PC

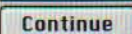




Or they could just use Dark Basic to make a *Shadow of the Beast* demo. Edge wonders if it's still rubbish?



The Dark Basic website, yesterday. Go there, enter the competition, win, and send Edge prizes. Simple



Science Genius Girl Karaoke
DNA strands in **Edge**'s hair!
Winning Eleven 7
Free-scoring **Edge**'s Master League record: P14 W1 D11 L2 F1 A2
Hacking Halo
Shotguns that fire like tanks? Warthogs as grenades? Hurrah!

Quit

The Theory that holidays refresh you
They don't. They just make you not want to work, ever
Getting review code for games
Why send to **Edge** when you can get higher scores elsewhere?
Dreamcast PSO Servers Shutdown
Tink, Taurus, Loco Latino and Alec Empire: thanks for the memories



07 Developing Online Games

Of all the subjects to try and encapsulate in a book, developing online games is perhaps the least reducible one you could choose – it's just so huge. Designing and developing an online game to launch isn't even half the battle. After launch, you have to deal with huge customer support issues, constant hacking and servers bandwidth/stability issues as well as ongoing patching and the addition of new content to try and keep your fanbase paying their monthly subscription. Which goes to make Jessica Mulligan and Bridgette Patrovsky's tome all the more amazing, as they pretty much manage to pull it off. Of course, it helps that the two authors have over 30 years of experience in the area of online games, having been around since early attempts such as AOL's ADD: *NeverWinter Nights* through *Ultima Online* and *EverQuest*. The tone of the book helps too. More an insiders' critique of the knowledge accumulated by online development community over the years than a How To, it's highly readable and even a bit catty in places. For like the gamers they serve, online game developers are a very tight bunch. Believing their type of game is more a way of life than just entertainment, they tend to display a evangelical streak and no one, not even the publishers or the moneymen, get in the way. Still, the fact remains, developing an online game is the fastest way the industry has yet come up with of losing tens of millions of dollars. So if you happen to be working on one, get yourself to a shrink, quick. Alternatively, read this book.

08 Ilium

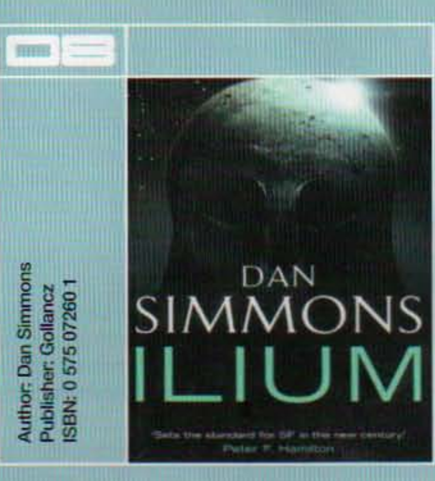
Early civilisation seems to be the hip new-old thing in 2003 culture: postmodern reworkings of the ancients are coming from authors as varied as Robert Harris ('Pompeii') and Robert Silverberg ('Roma Eterna'), not to mention the forthcoming Brad Pitt blockbuster movie 'Troy'. And it's this latter period from which Dan Simmons has taken his inspiration for 'Ilium'. Renowned for his mixing of high culture with speculative sci-fi - seen most notably in his Chaucer and Keats-inspired novel, 'Hyperion' – this time, Simmons combines three separate storythreads; managing to work in Proust and Shakespeare-spouting robots within the wider world of a take on Homer's mythology. As is typical in such cases, each thread is constructed to jar when the seemingly separate worlds come together but Simmons knows exactly what he's doing. In a post-human earth of the future, a million people live a life of ease until they are sent upto heaven aged exactly one hundred. Meanwhile, the literature-inspired mechs are on a mission to nuke Mars, which has been terraformed by unknown forces, and elsewhere the war between Greece and Troy is being replayed by the gods, so they can check how accurate Homer's version of events really was. Thankfully, Ilium is just a fun as it sounds. Despite being a long book at 570 pages, its size emphasises enjoyment rather than tedium and while the whole construct is seldom highbrow, enough erudition is on show between the slabs of sci-fi style to keep the most pedantic reader engrossed.

07



Author: Jessica Mulligan & Bridgette
Publisher: New Riders
ISBN: 1 5927 3000 0

08



Author: Dan Simmons
Publisher: Gollancz
ISBN: 0 575 07260 1

09



Site: **The Real Getaway Tour**
URL: **www.geocities.com/the_real_getaway_tour**

09 Website of the month

"Playing the *The Getaway* on PS2 wasn't enough," says the blurb on the front page of The Real Getaway Tour. "They had to do the missions in real life." Which doesn't involve ludicrous and driving and indiscriminate killing, thankfully, but instead lots of photos of London and its virtual Team Soho-created counterpart. The promotional language and the links at the bottom – one to buy the game and one to the official site – make **Edge** a little suspicious that this is something more than a fan project, but even if it's SCEE marketing then it's a meme that's worthy of attention.

10 Advertainment

Japan: Hey, it's *Minna no Golf Online*. Again.



"Okay, my little friend, that seems simple but in fact golf is not a sport for anyone."



"You see, this area doesn't appear that hard but in fact… you need an effect like this and…"



"Did you see? Did you see?"



"Grandpa, you are soooo good."
"Hmmm, what did you say?"



"You are the best, Grandpa!"
"No, no, no, say it louder – here, take this."



"GRANDPA, YOU ARE NUMBER OOOOOONE!"



"Aaaaaaaaaaah, I already know that."



REDEYE

A sideways look at the videogame industry

Education, education, education

On the evening of June 25, Aaron Hamel, a 45-year-old nurse from Knoxville, Tennessee, was driving on the I-40 highway, through nearby Newport. His cousin **Denise Deneau** was in the passenger seat. The pair were on their way back from a day out in the mountains. "We were driving down the interstate, back from a great trip," Deneau later told ABC News. "My cousin said, 'Look at those flowers,' and then all of sudden through my window came a bullet. The heat was so much I could feel it. On my lap, I saw broken glass and lots of blood. I thought I had been shot."

But she hadn't. The blood belonged to Aaron, her cousin, the driver of a car now out of control, travelling at 70mph against traffic. Imagine that: covered in blood and glass and God knows what else, in a speeding vehicle you have no way of stopping. And, when the car finally, fortunately – if fortune can be considered in a situation like this – grinds to a stop against the guard rail, imagine looking to the driver's seat and seeing blood gushing from a wound in your cousin's temple. Head shot. Instant kill, isn't it, kids?

On August 28, 13-year-old Joshua Buckner and his 16-year-old stepbrother William pleaded guilty to the reckless homicide of Aaron Hamel. Joshua had stolen two .22 calibre rifles from his parents' closet a week before the shootings, and hidden them in nearby woods. On the evening of June 25, the pair headed off to a small hill with line of sight to the I-40 highway. Their intention was to shoot at the sides of passing trucks. They were bored. They'd been inspired by *Grand Theft Auto*.

On September 5, Hamel's family filed a lawsuit against Take 2 Interactive.

And it's now September 9, and after four days of weighing up the arguments RedEye still isn't sure they're doing the wrong thing.

Being defensive about these things comes naturally to the videogame community. As a player of videogames, which is presumably what you are if you're reading this, you find your hobby attacked from all sides, often via geek cliché, and often through the all-videogames-are-violent route. And it's likely you'll probably be quite practised in the art of defending yourself by now: videogaming is a creative medium just like any other, it's no different to watching a film, videogames are a developing artform, *Rez*, yada yada yada…

And it is never good to be in support of censorship, no matter what the medium. We live in a free society so we don't ban expressionism, be it through music, film, art or videogames. We just hope that people make the right choices: that they pick up Britney and discard the Jim Davidson DVDs, that they read Nabokov and not the 'Daily Mail'. Or more than hope, in fact; we have to educate.

So, *Grand Theft Auto* is a great game. It is also clearly marked as an 18, or at least as clearly marked as a DVD film is, and it is illegal for game stores to sell the game to customers who are underage. That said, most parents aren't aware the ratings system exists for videogames. Which might not be that damaging, since RedEye's watched a GAME employee point out the symbol on the back of *Vice City* to a confused grandmother, a policy which, in theory, should place the weight of responsibility firmly on the buyer. But even if that policy was universal, which it's obviously not, the problem isn't really that non-gamers don't know the ratings exist. It's that many of them don't feel there's any reason for them *to* exist, because these are just videogames, just blip blop bloop and *Pac-Man* and just something to shut the children up for a day.

And that's where we need to educate. How about a campaign funded by the industry as a whole, aimed at a global audience who don't yet recognise that videogames can be intelligent, emotional, mature, exciting, dangerous and, above all, for adults? We could run a smart series of adverts – print, posters, TV and radio spots, everything – that not only convince people to think twice before buying kids in the early teens *Rape & Murder III: Go Get 'Em!* but also promote the idea of videogames as an appreciable form of entertainment for someone out of their teenage years. Hell, it might actually increase sales, marketing guys! And, while we're at it, we could make some effort to stop individual publishers targeting inappropriate games at young audiences. Such as Take 2, for example.

Videogame magazines are, by and large, for kids. In fact, **Edge** is the only videogame magazine for adults, yet it's one of the few that hasn't run a *Grand Theft Auto* cover. Many, if not most, magazine covers will have been put together with the blessing and aid of Take 2's PR and marketing department. They are, to all intents and purposes, full colour front-page adverts for an 18-rated product, aimed directly at under-18s.

RedEye doesn't know if the situation's the same in the States, but if it is, and it comes up in court, he'd be interested to hear Take 2's defence against accusations that it's been pimping an adult experience to minors. He wouldn't mind hearing some UK magazine publishers doing the same, too, since from where RedEye's sitting there's a lot of people covered in Aaron Hamel's blood.

That's the thing. If *GTA* didn't exist, RedEye thinks Hamel would be alive today, which is the kind of stark and binary argument that quietens his instinctive defences. Of course, US firearm culture played a more direct role in the nurse's death: that the two guns that were missing from the family home for a whole week before his murder is frightening, almost incomprehensible. And sure, if they hadn't been inspired by *GTA*, the bored teens could well have been doing something equally destructive – killing themselves inspired by 'Jackass', or whatever this week's vogue scapegoat is.

"Until the videogame industry starts to behave with some responsibility and maturity, its defence against instinctive litigation is weak"

But until the industry starts to behave with some responsibility and maturity, its defence against this type of instinctive litigation is weak, and the costs will be huge. Not just in human terms, but something those pushing *GTA* heavily to parents at Christmas time seem to find much easier to understand: money.

*RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with **Edge**'s*

One of my most treasured possessions as a child was a particular copy of the sci-fi comic '2000AD'. On a blue background, the cover showed Judge Dredd's badge, with a bullet hole in it. Scrawled below, in red ink, was the single word "Dead?" That was it: Dredd Dead? That week's cliffhanger, after Dredd had the previous week turned his Lawgiver on himself to escape a sticky situation at the hands of the Sovs, was, for the way it had strung me bodily up on its narrative meathook, my who-shot-JR? and JFK-assassination all rolled into one. It was the best cover of any publication I have ever seen.

And now I can actually be Dredd, thanks to Rebellion's *Judge Dredd: Dredd vs Death*. Playing early code, I was pleasantly surprised at how faithfully the bulbous day-glo architecture of Mega-City One had been reproduced, and even Dredd's voice is not embarrassingly inappropriate.



TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

Beg, borrow and steal, but move on

I wonder, though, if I want to be Dredd, rather than watch him. Just as *Perfect Dark* failed to make a Croft-style heroine out of Joanna Dark because she was seen only in cut-scenes, it is a shame that a Dredd game only lets you see Dredd – this fabulous distillation of 20th-century macho cool, looking back to Eastwood and McQueen and forward to Robocop and the Terminator – in its own cut-scenes, and when you die. Seeing Dredd die, of course, is the very unthinkable proposition that my '2000AD' cover played on, and I wonder if the repeated representation of the unkillable lawman crumpling to the ground somehow dilutes the iconic legacy of the character.

Nevertheless, the translation into fluid videogame form of this popular-culture icon has escaped utterly betraying its source (consider, by contrast, all the terrible Superman or Spider-Man games we have suffered over the years). Its method of exploiting the comic-book medium may be contrasted with Ubisoft's *XIII*. This inventive cel-shaded FPS has had the critics salivating for a long time, yet for all its best-game-of-ECTS success so far, I remain unconvinced by it. It is certainly true that it delivers a powerful shock of aesthetic originality. As you shoot a distant foe up on a ridge and watch three comic-strip panels pop up relating in stop-motion his injury and fall, it's hard not to be impressed. The art direction deserves a shower of Oscars. But further play had me thinking more critically about the experience of playing the game as a whole.

Let's remember that the comic-book format is essentially closer to the medium of film than that of videogames. It is, to start with, very obviously 'directed'. Every frame is drawn from a particular camera angle so as to maximise artistic impact. Something like this method, of course, is possible in videogames such as the *Biohazard* or *Silent Hill* series, but in those games the camera cannot switch angles as often as it can in a comic strip, where the artist may decide to split just a single second of action into numerous panels. The latter ability is what interests *XIII*, and what it reproduces – but it is largely reproduced only as window-dressing. These gorgeous, hyper-stylised comic-book panels are not in themselves interactive processes but merely dog-treats to feed the player who has done the correct thing in the game. The disjunction between the decorative 2D panelling and the 3D FPS environment tends to render the latter all the more aesthetically anonymous. There seems to be a cognitive divorce between the space in which you play the game and the space in which you enjoy it visually: the panels may be inset on any part of the screen but they belong to a different epistemic universe.

XIII is also formally inferior to what it has made such beautiful efforts to emulate in that, being a videogame, it must exist sequentially in time. Occasionally an inset device may be used cleverly so as to provide parallel representations – such as when you overhear a conversation through a wall, and that conversation is visualised and animated in a little box – but what no videogame can offer is the superb temporal flexibility of the comic-book. A comic artist may choose to draw a whole page or spread in which there is no obvious progression between panels. The eye may be led around a certain route by the composition but it is also free to travel haphazardly, to consume the page in any order it pleases and to make connections at its own leisure. In this way comics are obviously closer to paintings, and trump both films and videogames in their aesthetic flexibility.

There is even, I think, something wrong in *XIII*'s reproduction of the comic-book 'visual sound effect'. Born as a way of overcoming the comic's inbuilt sonic incapacity, the stylised and iconic typography of 'Bam!' and 'Boom!' becomes a form of double creativity in itself, both visually and linguistically, since each writer/artist team may constantly invent new onomatopoeic forms ('Chukachukachuka') for their own invented action. But to provide these signs in a videogame that also provides real sound effects is to obliterate their evocative capacity, and to remove the need for real creativity in their choice, since by the time they are seen on the screen they are already forever tied down to being mere indices of the particular explosion or gunfire shot that is right now coming out of your TV speakers.

In the end I think that *XIII*, for all its artistic brilliance, is predicated upon a sort of hubris which assumes that a videogame can do everything a comic-book can do, and more. Well, it can't. Not *XIII*, not *Dredd vs Death*. (I was also disappointed, that the latter chose not to use as its influence the art style of Carlos Ezquerra, my favourite Dredd artist and the man who created the character.) Maybe the best ever translation of a comic remains the hilarious 2D 1980s version of 'Spy vs Spy', but for all the sadistic fun you could have with a friend, even that could never reproduce the anarchic brilliance of the paper form: comics, remember, are a scripted, narrative medium too.

Comic envy seems to be a current fad in videogames, like film envy used to be, but it becomes quickly apparent, as it did with 'cinematic' games, that too slavish an imitation merely points up the ways in which games can't compete and forgets their own virtues. Games should steal what they can, but then move on.

> "Comic envy is a fad in videogames but it's apparent that too slavish an imitation merely points up the ways in which games can't compete"

Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: steven_poole@mac.com

Though I'm often so busy that I don't get the opportunity, and that makes me so miserable, I really like to go to the cinema to see movies. Recently, though, I got the opportunity to take an evening off, and go to the theatre to watch 'T3', 'Terminator 3'. You've heard of it, of course. If you're anything like me, you'll have suspected that it's not going to be as enjoyable as the first two. But I was pleasantly surprised, as the movie actually turned to be very good. In fact, I felt it was worth watching again. It's one of those movies you can enjoy even if you know exactly what's going to happen – a linear adventure that is worth experiencing again. I think that you can find two main reasons for this.

The first case is that put by those people who enjoyed the story, or at least the message featured in the story. The second case is put by those who just enjoy the feeling of excitement generated by the story, regardless of the message. Now, I had presumed that the first case is the most common, since I'm among them. But perhaps people in the second case are numerous as well. I thought 'Matrix Reloaded' was a very entertaining movie, but it's not one that I would like to watch again. Rather than a coherent, well-worked tale, 'Matrix Reloaded' seemed more to me like a collage, an experience woven from several gorgeous and breathtaking sequences. It's like when you have these big shows promoted on TV with hyperbole like "Look! We have seen them! The world's most amazing, high-quality quality visuals ever!" There is almost no place for the story to be told, no place for narrative logic, in the face of such a visual tsunami.

Of course, sure, the visuals are great and we can understand the basic scenario without too much of a problem, but at the end I asked myself, "Did I learn anything from this?" and of course, the answer was 'no'. These sequences were pretty cool and impressive and stand now as reference points to others in their field. But at the end of the day, as the souvenir of those visuals fade away inside me, there is nothing much left in my heart about this movie. I may be repeating myself on this but, yes, these sequences are superb. There is no doubt about their impact on screen; but that impact does not stand the test of time.

However, that was probably the intention of the Wachowski brothers. I'm pretty sure that the creators did not focus on the story, but on the visual aspect of their movie, and in that respect they did a perfect job. The movie has been a fabulous success, and people are excited by what the directors showed them – even if it's not the sort of movie I'd go and see again.

So what does push me into watching a movie more than once? Well, essentially, I like non-fiction movies, documentaries where the reality surpasses anything fiction can achieve. Which isn't to slight made-up stories – they can be exceptionally interesting, but I can't help loving the feeling of having an insight into somebody else's destiny. It is truly exciting.





AV OUT

Toshihiro Nagoshi, general manager, Sega Creative Center division

There are non-fiction films. So why not games?

All that said, do you agree that there aren't enough non-fiction games? Sure, it is true to say that the environment is often based on the past, and perhaps some of the storyline is too. Maybe the hero also carries a famous name, one well-known in human history. And sometimes, particularly in wargames, the level structure outlines a particular conflict.

Nevertheless, it is still rare to find a videogame narrative constructed strictly around a non-fiction storyline. Why? Would it be boring to develop such a game, without the freedom to take the player through your imagination? I don't think so. I believe that if you can set the theme and the goals perfectly, it could be both challenging to the designer, and successful as a product. And I think that if you define precisely the environment, make it as close to reality as you can achieve, then you can get a very enjoyable and solid result.

Of course, non-fiction allows the player to gain some insight into events that occurred in the past. But that isn't the only thing it offers; I think there is also a quest for the truth – to corroborate the things we are told by books and teachers. And also, the chance to experience history again and be placed in a situation far removed from our own gives us a real opportunity to appreciate something that was previously so distant. I think this is really interesting and really fun, in a way. It's something that only videogames can achieve in such a convincing manner, too. And... oops! Now I'm starting to feel envy; I want to develop something like this. Since there are such good non-fiction movies in the theatre, I really think there is an interesting challenge ahead in gaming. Do you agree? I would like somebody to do one, to at least try the idea. Hey, why don't you start it yourself and show the way? And if you don't, I may need to consider this idea seriously, because I really want to make the non-fiction genre as much a part of the videogame world as it is a part of the movie industry – this represents a great desire of mine. Ah, I could talk about movies again with you, sometimes. In fact thinking about it, perhaps I should consider a regular column in a movie magazine – I would like to speak about movies sometime instead of always writing only about aspects of videogaming! It's always so easy to write about the things you love, isn't it? See you next month!

"It is still rare to find a videogame narrative constructed strictly around a non-fiction storyline. Why? Would it be boring to develop such a game?"

Prior to Sega's recent restructuring, Toshihiro Nagoshi was president of Amusement Vision

Sometimes, analogies are like socks; you stuff them down your pants merely to pad out a flaccid column. Other times, analogies are an simple method of explaining complicated stuff in a concise shorthand. Such as the following analogy to describe Nintendo over the past decade: it is the Anthea Turner of gaming. To wit; from successful, halcyon days appealing to a broad demographic, both have fallen dramatically from favour and fashion, becoming increasingly (decreasingly?) marginalised, to the point where their fanbases consist exclusively of bewildered psychopaths, and people who really should get out more.

It's been painful to watch Nintendo's slide. Like any gamer worth his salt, I've long considered myself to be a fan of Nintendo above any other company (then again, there hasn't been a great deal of competition… saying you like EA is a bit like saying you're a fan of Phil Collins-era Genesis).

I denied to myself that any such thing was happening, that Nintendo was still the only games company worth monitoring – even when it released the likes of *Cruisin' USA* (doubtless a wasted opportunity to court the pink pound).

Throughout the '90s, it repeatedly proved itself to be hopelessly out of touch with the demands of its audience. You know: all that making a big song and dance of eschewing blood and gore, before being forced into that woefully embarrassing climb-down. Failing to capitalise on its most popular properties. Stretching the aforementioned Shigsy too thinly. Becoming complacent, and relying too heavily on *Pokémon*. Treating the European market with apparent contempt. Generally sitting in the corner at the disco, fiddling with its shirt buttons, while its rivals strutted across the dancefloor, enticing pretty girls to be their dance partners by slapping their needlessly bare buttocks, and yelping loudly…

same consistency of quality as it did in those early days of the SNES, but – for me at least – there's still something lacking. Nintendo feels now more like a lumbering – if well-rehearsed – dinosaur, than a swift, cutting-edge newcomer, hungry for success. Albeit more Spandau Ballet than Rolling Stones. More Human League than The Darkness.

For far too much of *Super Mario Sunshine*, *Super Metroid* and *The Wind Waker*, I found myself being impressed without being entertained. All three are structured to the nth degree; to the point where I get a headache just thinking of the pre-planning that must have gone into the worlds, the puzzles, the tidiness of it all. This may be heresy to admit, but I failed to finish any of them. With each, at some point before the end, I got bored or frustrated, and just couldn't be bothered to carry on; the gin larder was calling. That never used to happen with Nintendo's games, and it has shaken me to my very larynx.



BIFFOVISION

Page 28, press hold, and reveal. 'Digitiser's founder speaks out
Is Nintendo the new Sega?

Call me Slowy Slowson if you will, but I've only just got around to playing *The Wind Waker*. At least one hardcore gamer mate considers this a dereliction of my duty as a gamesplayer – indeed, when I told him this he literally spat in my face, and I was forced to retract my admission, while he threatened to thrash at my ankles with his belt. But that needless lie aside, the fact I was prepared to wait until I had a spare 40 quid, rather than go out and whore myself to raise the money the morning the game was released, has – if you'll excuse the double entendre – thrusted home the fact that I, like many of my peers, am no longer anywhere near as interested in Nintendo as I once was.

Why has this happened? Surely, Nintendo is the gamer's games company; the daddy of daddies. The one company which can be relied upon to pique the curiosity of anyone who considers themselves a serious gamer. Perhaps once. Now no more. Now I regularly feign excitement upon the announcement of a new Nintendo game.

Thing is, it'd be easy to blame the situation on Sony. Or even Microsoft. Or even Akin Drum – who lives on the moon, and plays upon a ladle. Anyone, frankly, but face the ghastly reality. Which is that the blame can only be laid at the door of Nintendo itself. I, like many of my peers, gritted my teeth and watched the company gradually flounder on the shingle of Ineptitude Beach. Like many of my peers,

Naturally, there is an argument that Nintendo has finally come out of the other end of this period of dreadful grimness. Unfortunately – while there's no denying the overall quality of its GameCube output – it seemingly lacks the business sense to compete in the modern market. Oh, to be sure, publicly the company may deny that it's in competition with Sony and Microsoft ("We don't even know who Sony and Microwhateveritis are," a Nintendo spokesman said). But the truth appears to be that Nintendo no longer knows how to be a competitor. Indeed, neither Sony or Microsoft seem overly bothered by what Nintendo does (at least, as far as consoles go… handhelds may prove to be a different proposition).

There's also a worrying sense that Nintendo is going the route of certain '80s pop bands – peddling its wares to an aging nostalgia circuit, now that it's struggling to find a new audience. While that may seem hypocritical, having just accused the company of previously squandering its greatest assets, too many of its recent sequels have been slick greatest hits packages, rather than the innovative, groundbreaking wares the company once produced. Admittedly, you could argue that it would be impossible if Nintendo managed to maintain the

I'm not saying I don't like Nintendo's recent output; indeed, compared to the majority of games out there, Nintendo's titles boast ten times the charm, wit and ingenuity of their nearest rivals. And yet… there's still a sense that the company is treading water. Literally for much of *The Wind Waker*.

"Nintendo's titles boast ten times the charm, wit and ingenuity of their nearest rivals. And yet… there's still a sense that the company is treading water"

Yeah, it looks different to other *Zelda* games (though it doesn't look anywhere near as lovely as we're told it does) but the gameplay is more or less a retread of *Ocarina of Time*. That said, a retread of *Ocarina of Time* is infinitely preferable to a retread of *Tomb Raiders* I through IV, or a *Max Payne* clone, or – heaven forbid – a sequel to *Blinx: The Time Sweeper*.

But still… it's just a big shame that Nintendo is apparently losing its grip, and almost seems prepared to let itself slide towards becoming the next Sega. Now that Sony is planning a long overdue assault on the handheld market, Nintendo can no longer afford to rest on its laurels and pretend that it's in a market of one. And – pff – it's going to take a lot more than releasing a new version of the GameCube with a plastic bloody Pikachu stuck on it.

Mr Biffo is a semi-retired videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge****'s*

Edge's most wanted

Sing

Finally, a chance to find definitive proof that **Edge** is the best singer in Bath's karaoke halls. Shame it doesn't give points for stage presence and charisma



(PlayStation2) SCEE

Karaoke Revolution

Finally, a chance to find... Hang on a second. There's a bit of a theme emerging here. Never mind. **Edge** has got enough vocal presence to share between the two



(PlayStation2) Konami

Fatal Frame 2: Crimson Butterfly

Edge needs this delicately horrible sequel as soon as possible – before the evenings get too dark and that scuttling from behind the curtains starts up again



(PlayStation2) Tecmo

Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life

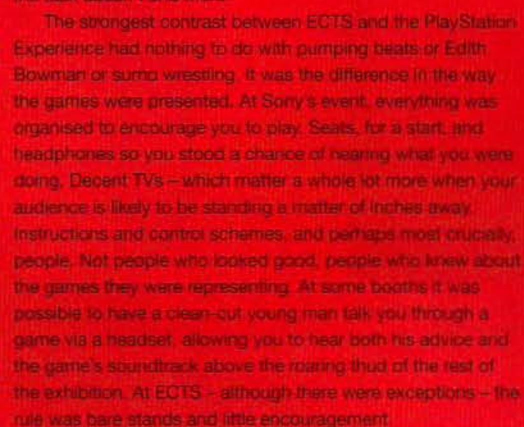
Edge would never call itself bored of Animal Crossing, but the prospect of a whole new miniature-idyll is as enticing as the title suggests



(GameCube) Ubisoft

You never forget the first time

Edge checks its teeth for spinach on the way to ECTS



Making demos isn't easy. The game is unstable and unfinished, yet you need to corral an accessible but representative section of it and make it strong enough to withstand being grabbed and mauled and thumbed by hundreds of people – some who care, some who don't. But the task doesn't end there.

The strongest contrast between ECTS and the PlayStation Experience had nothing to do with pumping beats or Edith Bowman or sumo wrestling. It was the difference in the way the games were presented. At Sony's event, everything was organised to encourage you to play. Seats, for a start, and headphones so you stood a chance of hearing what you were doing. Decent TVs – which matter a whole lot more when your audience is likely to be standing a matter of inches away. Instructions and control schemes, and perhaps most crucially, people. Not people who looked good, people who knew about the games they were representing. At some booths it was possible to have a clean-cut young man talk you through a game via a headset, allowing you to hear both his advice and the game's soundtrack above the roaring thud of the rest of the exhibition. At ECTS – although there were exceptions – the rule was bare stands and little encouragement.

It makes sense. The Sony event was for the public, ECTS for trade. One group of amateurs, one of professionals. But anyone who spent any time queuing at both events soon became aware of which section of people spent more of their time gaming. From what **Edge** saw, most of the people at ECTS needed more handholding than the grizzled 13-year-old twitch machines roaming the Sony halls. Game after game was abandoned by disillusioned dippers-in. Too hard, too cut-sceney, too confusing, too many loading screens. All too often it fell to other attendees to lean over someone's shoulder and say 'try pressing X'.

Demos matter. No artwork, no Prescreen, no review – not even **Edge**'s – has the impact of your first hands-on experience. First impressions often determine how much leeway you are prepared to give a game, whether you will forgive it the foibles that even the best of them exhibit. And when so many developers and publishers that **Edge** meets bemoan the fact that they have no free time to play anymore, their snatched glimpses of games at ECTS may be the only chance they get to form an opinion.





032



034



036



037



038

Transformers Armada

Melbourne House prepares one in the eye for everyone who's ever laughed at **Edge**'s Transformers duvet



The game has the potential to be unusually beautiful, with lush rolling levels and dynamic cut-scenes by the Japanese studio responsible for the hugely impressive *Soul Calibur II* cinematic sequences



A jungle. Good foliage cover and enemies approaching from the river. Years of gaming experience mean you have no hesitation in what to do next. You strafe right, half-circling them before taking out the leader with your sniper scope. But that gives them a bead on your position, so you switch to missiles and thunder down the slope, momentum adding weight to the melee attack which downs the last survivor. Quite literally, all in a day's work for **Edge**. And then you turn into a sports car and pull doughnuts amongst the smouldering wreckage.

Edge isn't excited about *Armada* because it's Transformers. Well, it is, but that's not the only reason. The phenomenal success of the brand has always hinged on simple, stereotyped and unusually sound reasoning: "Boys love cars. Boys love robots. Let's make a robot that's a car!" Perhaps inadvertently (perhaps not) Melbourne House has twisted the equation to make it fit its new market. "Gamers love shooting things. Gamers love driving fast. How about…"

"However at one with the handling an ordinary racing game allows you to become, only as a Transformer can you truly be the car"



Although the Transformers move heavily, they never appear to be clumsy or slow

Edge isn't claiming it's the first game where you get to drive and shoot. Too many hours have been spent messing around in Warthogs for that. But the inclusion of jeeps and tanks is usually a rational extension of the game, and their use is often rationed and controlled. Nothing prepares you for the delights of charging up the steps of an Aztec temple in a truck. Games are good because they let you do things life normally doesn't let you. Which means that games are even better when they let you do things games don't *normally* let you do. And however at one with the handling an ordinary racing game allows you to become, only as a Transformer can you truly be the car.

The pivot of the 'Armada' cartoons, toys and now the game is the discovery of the Mini-cons, a third race of tiny robots who can attached themselves to the larger robots like kindly parasites, lending them their abilities while leeching a little power. As a consequence, they become the subject of a fierce battle between the two old adversaries.

It's interesting to note that despite not being the game's invention, the way the Mini-cons function – bolt-on accessories which augment firepower and enhance capabilities – is a very videogame idea. As a consequence they sit very happily as a way of controlling progress and rewarding exploration in the game. Melbourne House knows the importance of gratifying a player, and it hopes that the discovery of each new Mini-con will produce the same tingle of excitement as do the chests in *Zelda*.

Some have straightforward functions, such as missile capabilities or extra shielding, but they become more tactically significant when they offer invisibility, night vision, or convert your Transformer into a glider. Each Mini-con puts a different drain on your

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Atari**
Developer: **In-house (Melbourne House)**
Origin: **Australia**
Release: **May 2004**









character's energy, and you can equip as many as you have the power to support. Designing these teams is more complicated than it seems, since each of the main Transformers has its own unique abilities, and a differing total amount of power. The result is that despite only offering three playable characters (Hot Shot, Optimus Prime and Red Alert), *Armada* offers dozens of combinations which can be tailored to fit any situation.

Licences always bring their own limitations, and the challenge Melbourne House faced was how to design a satisfying action game when neither the Transformers nor the Decepticons could ever be killed outright. Its solution was to invent the Decepticlones, a gratifyingly explosive drone army who can be destroyed with a clear conscience. Should your Transformer take an almost fatal hit, he will be transported back to HQ, and you can repair and re-jig your Mini-con configuration before returning to the last checkpoint.

The scale of the levels is not just technical showboating. There are 40 Mini-cons hidden in the game, and as you find more your new abilities allow you to return and access new areas, which in turn will conceal more Mini-cons. Boss fights are not curtailed by any kind of arena, which means if the robot-on-robot action is getting too hot for you, you can transform and squeal away for a breather. Except your enemy is likely to turn into a helicopter and pursue. Also, any Decepticlones you previously dodged will come back to haunt you.

Historically, Transformers games have a bad reputation, but it looks like that may be about to change.





We never thought we'd ever get excited about a Transformers game, but *Transformers Armada* could be the one to break a curse that's festered for nearly 20 years, since the dreadful Commodore 64 game

Broken Sword III: The Sleeping Dragon

Insider information on an ancient conspiracy?
Let's just say, **Edge** hasn't always been a traffic warden...



The richness of detail can border on the overwhelming, but a discrete blue twinkle always targets the player's attention to objects of interest, meaning there is never any need to wander aimlessly pressing X



Face to face

Broken Sword's facial animation system can be used to set the curl of the lip or the narrowing of the eye. Tiny variations in the settings can produce emphatic changes, from scepticism and suspicion to flirtation and surprise. By producing an accessible tool, Revolution has allowed the scriptwriters to retain control of each character's face, which should ensure the best possible correlation between the tone of each line and the look in each eye.



Edge doesn't mean to be a gossip, but there's something you should know. Charles Cecil loves you. He told **Edge** so, you see – or, rather more convincingly, he showed **Edge** so, as he outlined the exhaustive efforts that he and the team at Revolution are going to to ensure that anyone who plays *Broken Sword* enters into a world which is beautiful and engrossing.

The Sleeping Dragon's remit – to extend the narrative strength, cerebral challenge and visual beauty of the *Broken Sword* series into three dimensions – has been detailed in previous issues of **Edge**. When games are nearing completion, a developer's focus often becomes tighter, identifying smaller and smaller problems. But, as **Edge** suggested in last issue's 'Ten Commandments', it's these not-so-trivial details that can puncture an otherwise successful game.

Sometimes, game designers' obsession with the cinematic can overshadow more mundane considerations. In *Broken Sword*, however, its fixed camera and exploratory nature mean the cinematography is crucial to producing a satisfying game experience, and Cecil is watchful of every tiny detail. In early code, a balcony shot was filled with the brown shadowed side of the building. Dissatisfied with the monotony of the composition, Cecil moved the camera, requiring the creation of a café and a sunny side street. The result is not just a prettier picture – the change much more effectively communicates a sense of place (see screenshots on opposite page).

"With the shift into three dimensions the player has to think more spatially, and get their hands much dirtier"

It's not a game of short, sharp shocks. Despite some sections having an air of *Tomb Raider* about them, the player is never required to manoeuvre George pixel by pixel. There are no ledges to tumble from, no jumps that can fall short. Once players have determined their route, they can rely on the graceful athleticism of the characters to execute it. Ensuring that players never die of ignorance, the game rescues them from potentially fatal situations with a tiny cut-scene outlining the danger. Once warned, however, you are on your own. But should the worst happen, the game restarts from the last room entered, removing any risk to the sense of atmosphere or the strength of the story by exposing it to repetition and player frustration.

But for all the innovation, every effort has been made to tug at the memories of loyal *Broken Sword* players. George is still voiced by the original voice artist, which adds an incalculable sense of continuity to the new look of the game. There are also quotes, both in the conventional sense of lines lifted from earlier incarnations, but in a visual sense too, engineered by moments when a character's animation echoes movements from a previous game. Puzzles still require lateral thinking and mental resourcefulness, but the shift into three dimensions gives the game a chance to poke its way into all sorts of virgin lobes. No longer limited to wrangling objects from one location to another, the player has to think more spatially, and get their hands much dirtier.

The pace of the game, and the safety nets in place to protect the player from

Format: **PS2, Xbox, PC**
Publisher: **THQ**
Developer: **Revolution**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **October**

Previously in **E**110, **E**116, **E**124













The 'action events' (left) that pepper the game require a quick eye, but reward you with dramatic and unexpected sequences which could never be accomplished within the game's usual controls

unforeseen death, could be an excuse for flabby controls, but Revolution is agonising over the finest details. Character control is managed through icons mapped to four action buttons. These change according to context, giving options to pick up, examine, straddle a balcony or jump over a chasm.

As things stand, the game tries to preserve continuity, consistently assigning, say, 'climb up' to the top button. Sounds sensible. But the nature of the game means that often only one option is open to the player, who will instinctively reach for the main action button only to find it mapped to nothing at all. So, change the system: have the most context-likely command activated by the main button. Which works fine until you do have a choice, and suddenly what was climb down becomes climb up. It's a laborious explanation, but one which highlights the remorseless level of scrutiny to which the game is being subjected. For the record, **Edge** favours the one-button system – and is curious to discover the final decision.

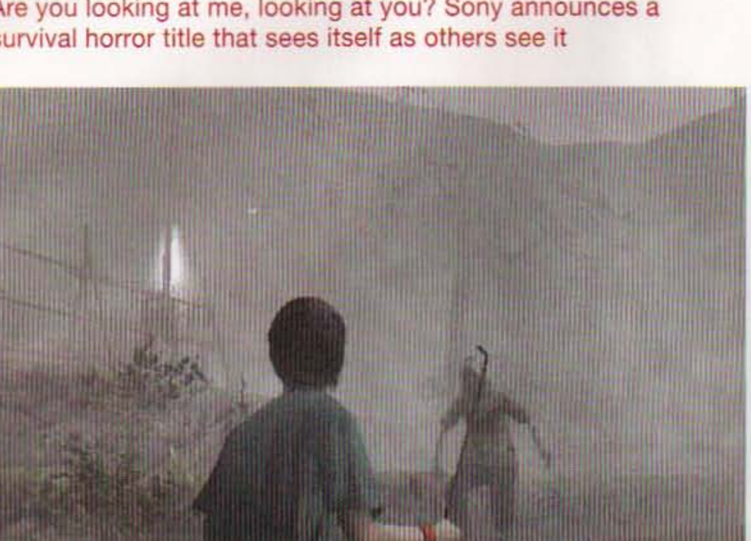
So there you have it. No garage-bought roses, no Barry White compilation tape. Revolution is hoping instead to woo you with artistry, thoughtfulness and effort. It's a process all good games – and many bad ones – go through, and alone is certainly not a guarantee of value. But **Edge** sees many reasons to be hopeful that *Broken Sword* will fully exploit the potential of a classic genre.

Siren

Format: PlayStatio
Publisher: SC
Developer: SC
Origin: Jap
Release: TB



Are you looking at me, looking at you? Sony announces a survival horror title that sees itself as others see it



Whatever happened to the village of Hanyuda, **Edge** is confident that it wasn't good. Things that leave an aftermath of bloodied seas and monstrous mutations rarely are. The story unfolds over three days, seen through the eyes – or rather over the shoulders – of ten very different characters, young and old, male and female. But its telling is not chronological. Play one character on the first day, and the next episode may feature a second character on the third day. From their story you might discover that the first character has by then become a zombie, so when the game zaps you back to the second day you are on the look out for any clues as to how they met their end. It's a wonderfully fatalistic idea for a game, although it's not yet clear if information you learn from the future can be used to influence the past.

As well as character swapping, players have the ability to tune into NPCs' vision – and 'tune in' isn't a metaphor. Using the left analogue you search around in the static for a clear signal from another creature, exactly as you tune a radio. Once found, it can be set to a face button and then, at any point, you can switch to see what they see. It opens up all sorts of gameplay avenues. Rather than having a spurious 'radar' to track an enemy, you are forced to make deductions about his location from observing what he's looking at. hiding behind a box from a particularly nasty freak, then rather than risk sticking your head over the parapet, look though his eyes until you can be sure that his back is turned, flick back to your own vision and shoot him in the back of the head.

It's not strictly survival horror, since it seems at this stage that some characters are doomed from the start, but it does share the scarcity of ammo and the hesitant, frightened pace that are the hallmarks of the genre. One level has you playing as an unarmed woman whose mission is to safeguard a young girl in her charge. Able to issue simple come here/run away/stay there commands, the combined helplessness of the two characters adds to the sense of confined hysteria.

Edge looks forward to this intriguing title revealing a lot more of itself.

The game is currently viciously hard, with one sho kills becoming commonplace in later levels





The characters produce a convincing impression of a village blighted by some unimaginable evil

Gregory Horror Show

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **November 21 (UK)**

Previously in **E**121

Capcom announces plans to open an international string of animatronic freak-show cabaret clubs. Well, not really, but it should...

Oh my. **Edge** is pelting down a hallway, clutching some stolen pornography, hoping it can dodge the pink fetish nurse before a bleeding zombie dog with a giant suppository and a strong right arm catches up and wreaks his revenge. It fails.

Having fetched up at Gregory's sinister hotel, it soon becomes clear that this is not a place for ordinary girls and boys. The only hope of escape lies in stealing the souls of your fellow freakish guests – a task which requires insider information. Talking to other characters may provide a few clues, but the real dirt comes from pressing your eye (and **Edge** means pressing – there's a wonderful rubbery squeak when you look around) to their keyhole and observing them as they go about their daily routines. Once you have secured their souls, it's simply a case of meeting a jive-talking, Swedish-flag-hatted grim reaper in your dreams and handing them over. Not that that's the end of your problems. Once separated from their souls, guests pursue you to exact their revenge, subjecting you to a grotesque and damaging Horror Show. Which is why, you see, **Edge** was pelting down a hallway.

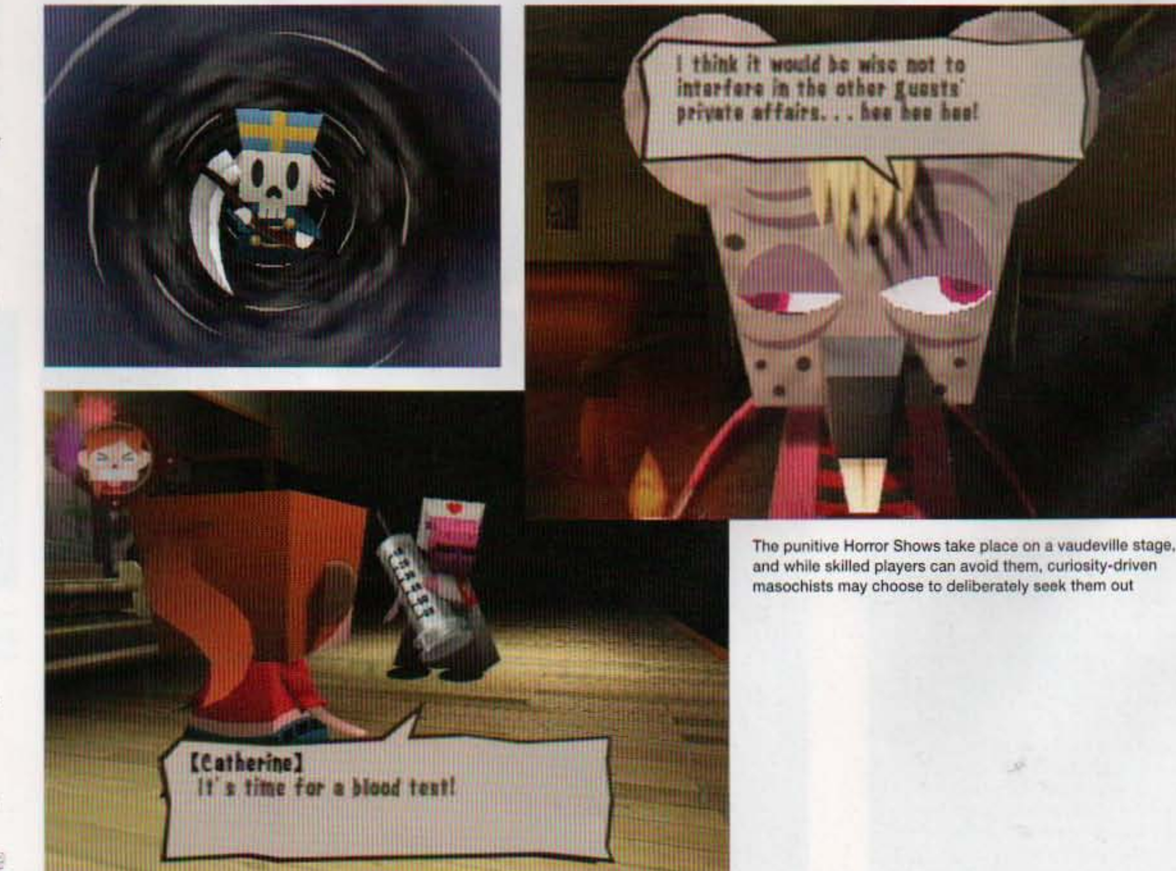
Initially the hotel only has a handful of guests, but as the number rises – and as your enemies multiply – navigating the corridors becomes an anxious obstacle course. Survival is a matter of balancing two concerns: sanity and fatigue. Just being in Gregory's flop-house nibbles away at your mental stability, and encounters with enraged guests can chomp a huge chunk of it. Should it run out, your character loses their mind and becomes a permanent resident. But being awake also affects your tiredness, which gradually escalates into headaches and paranoia. Sleep restores your sanity, but also advances the game's accelerated clock. Although the game is divided into three nominal 'nights', in reality you can cycle repeatedly through each 24-hour sequence until all the goals are accomplished.

Gregory Horror Show is profoundly, deliciously, hilariously shocking. Mutilation and masturbation are alluded to with perfect clarity, without the game once slipping towards any kind of obscenity – the story is only ever as depraved as your own imagination allows it to be. Combined with the magnificent characters and the irresistible lure of peeking into people's keyholes, it's enough to make **Edge** squeal. And hide in a wardrobe.









The punitive Horror Shows take place on a vaudeville stage, and while skilled players can avoid them, curiosity-driven masochists may choose to deliberately seek them out

Prince of Persia The Sands of Time

Format: PS2, PC, Xbox, G
Publisher: Ubiso
Developer: In-house (Ubisoft Montrea
Origin: Canad
Release: November 21 (PS2, PC), 2004 (Xbox, GC

What if, instead of a spider, Peter Parker had been bitten by a radioactive Errol Flynn?





A favourite title at both E3 and ECTS, *The Sands of Time* is shaping up to be one of the most impressive titles for PS2 this winter

Edge doesn't usually concern itself with shoes, but it knows for a fact that there is only the finest layer of suede between the Prince of Persia's feet and the marble of the palace floors. Not because it can see it, because it can feel it in the soft surety of his grip, and informed precision of his movements. Ideas of where to go next travel from **Edge**'s brain, down its arms, along the controller wire, into the Prince's body and out through his swift suede boots with the absoluteness of lightning earthing itself. *The Sands of Time* is playing very nicely indeed.

The plot introduces the Prince as headstrong aggressor, looking to bring glory on himself and his family. During the looting and burning of a rival Emir's palace, the Prince discovers a magical dagger and an enormous hourglass. An evil vizier tricks the Prince into unlocking the latter with the former and the sands of time are released, turning everyone they touch into glinting-eyed zombies. By killing them with the dagger the Prince can reclaim the sands, which enable him to control time and unlock the secrets of his mysterious blade.

Moving is liberating and intoxicating, whether it's running up walls like Jackie Chan or swinging from flagpoles like an Olympic parallel bar medallist. It makes for an unhindered translation from imagination to execution. Almost as fast as you can conceiv of a manoeuvre, the Prince performs it with sure-footed grace. It's a game that says at every turn: 'You can'.

Combat is based on attacks, blocks and dodges, but from these three building blocks are conjured endlessly unexpected aerial acrobatics that leave you awed but never bewildered. Vaulting over enemies, cart-wheeling and wall-springing, the only thing that gives them a chance against the Prince i their ability to teleport. And their nasty habit o coming back from the dead.

Notes of caution? One central puzzle is poorly laid out, turning the challenge into figuring out what to do, not how to do it. And although the camera provisions are generous (normally user controlled, it is possible to switch to firstperson and general room views) there remain the inevitable glitches, particular in tight corners.

The Sands of Time looks set to remain tru to the spirit of the original without resorting to trading off nostalgia. **Edge** can't wait to step into the Prince's shoes for real.





The time lord

The Prince can command time to run backwards with his dagger, so even after leaping to his death it's possible to watch him spring slowly back to life. Speeding up and slowing down time are vital for negotiating the blades, spikes and pitfalls that will be familiar to anyone who played the first game. In combat, his dagger can be used to freeze some enemies while he dispatches others – crucial during later mobbed attacks. All of these temporal hi-jinks use up his precious supply of sand however, and must be used carefully.





In a novel twist to combat the dreaded 'instant death' syndrome, the Prince can use the mysteriou sand to reverse time and undo those fatal errors

S.T.A.L.K.E.R: Oblivion Lost

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **THQ**
Developer: **GSC Gameworld**
Origin: **Russia**
Release: **Spring 2004**

Previously in **E**125

A world where vodka cures radiation, mutated pigs talk to themselves and British Airways is hiring mercenaries. 'We're crazy about realism' says Kiev's GSC Game World

Last issue **Edge** decided to ditch the FPS as a genre, a decision taken to enable us to better represent the huge range of styles contained within games that put you behind the eyes of someone with a gun. We were just in time. *Oblivion Lost* looks likely to stretch the old terminology to breaking point.

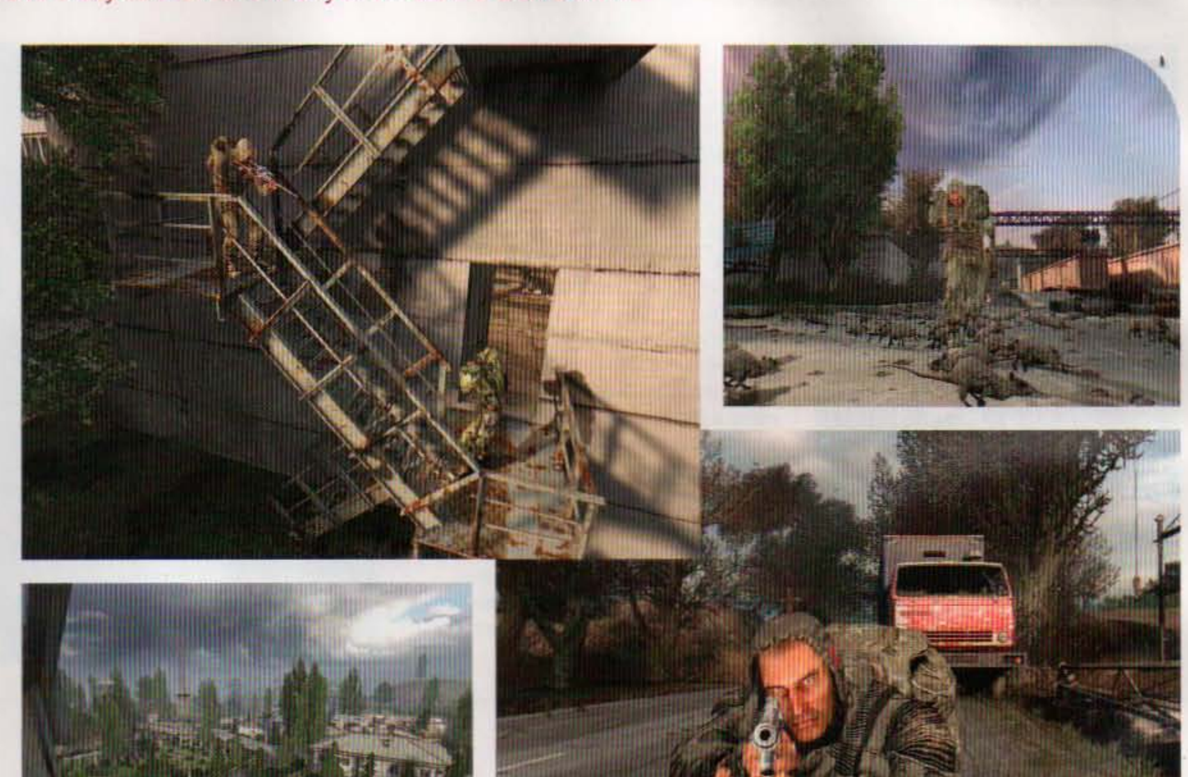
After a second, unexplained, explosion at Chernobyl, the army closes the area, and the only people willing to venture into the 'Zone' are bounty hunters, hoping to profit from the strange artefacts than can be found there. The deserted city has a beautiful, muted malevolence to it, but it's even more sinister than it looks, since the nuclear disasters have mutated local creatures, twisting their physical forms and giving them powers such as telekinesis, telepathy and invisibility. The Zone is also peppered with mysterious anomalies, which have dangerous and unpredictable effects on the player.

You aren't just pitched against mutated farm animals, however. Other Stalkers are working the Zone, all competing against each other for the valuable secrets it contains. They know the terrain as well as you do, and have access to the same equipment and information. Each has his own distinct personality, and it will be possible to do deals or form uneasy alliances with some of them.

It's an idea which means the game should be inherently well balanced for multiplayer games and should calibrate the difficulty level in response to your own abilities, since the more valuable kit you find and the more Stalkers you cross, the more will come looking for you.

The emphasis on realism means the player must consider health, stamina, food supplies and radiation levels. Your red gauge shows not health but blood – when wounded you will leave a trail and weaken until you can find somewhere to patch yourself up. If hunger is over-powering, you can risk eating a mutated rat – but you'd better have some vodka on hand to counter its radioactivity. Guns will wear out after their real-world life expectancy is exceeded and older vehicles steer poorly and won't start first time.

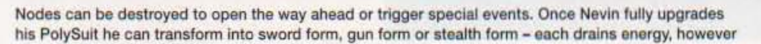
With around a million intriguing ideas for their game, and as yet no concrete framework within which to implement them, **Edge** can only hope that GSC's eyes aren't too big for its stomach. Although, allowing for the kind of anomalies that plague the Zone, eyes the size of stomachs has probably just become their million-and-first idea.











Nodes can be destroyed to open the way ahead or trigger special events. Once Nevin fully upgrades his PolySuit he can transform into sword form, gun form or stealth form – each drains energy, however

Bujingai

Format: PlayStation[illegible]
Publisher: Tait[illegible]
Developer: Red Entertainmen[illegible]
Origin: Japa[illegible]
Release: Christmas (Japan), TBC (UK[illegible]

The shrieking adulation of a nation of teenage girls may be all that stands between the human race and its annihilation...





3D combat games have proved hit and miss. *Bujingai* will need a reliable camera and careful balancing to succeed where *Devil May Cry 2* failed

It's the future and stuff has gone wrong. Videogames tend to have a reliably pessimistic view of the fate of the human race, but Red Entertainment has put its faith in an unlikely source of salvation. *Bujingai's* hero is modelled on J-pop superstar Gackt (**Edge** can only assume the name drips more disdainful cool in Japanese than it does in English), who has also performed the motion capture for the animation and recorded the dialogue.

Fighting the waves of enemies is as much about movement as combat, since Gackt can wall run, grab onto bars and fly short distances. As a consequence, the combat system is deliberately designed so that most of the moves you can do on the ground can also be used in the air. As well as attacking with his twin swords, Gackt can hurl fireballs and unleash earthquakes to flatten his enemies – and all-important combos can be sustained by powering up your shield until it functions as an automated guard and counters your opponents' blows.

GunGrave showed that Red knows its stuff, and *Bujingai* should expand on that with a greater reliance on exploration and a better fighting system. Gackt, meanwhile, has to return to his day job. **Edge** trembles to think what'll happen if his next single doesn't make number one.



Magic use depletes the pink bar (bottom left) and a greater range of 'spiritual power' attacks become available as you progress through the game and defeat the obligatory bosses

Fu-un Shinsen-Gumi

Format: PlayStation[illegible]
Publisher: Gen[illegible]
Developer: In-hous[illegible]
Origin: Japa[illegible]
Release: Winter (Japan), TBC (U[illegible]

The designer of Solid Snake and the makers of Sword of the Samurai team up for a samurai team-up

Part RPG, part squad-based RTS, this game puts you in the role of a member of the Shinsen-Gumi, the elite Samurai force which policed the streets of Kyoto when, in the last days of the Tokugawa Shogunate, an influx of rebels were threatening the peace.

Although a selection of characters are available from the beginning of the game, it's possible to edit and customise their profiles. During the day you patrol the lavish city, asking questions and looking for clues – not that you can afford to let your guard down, since you run the risk of ambushes and traps. Once you have located a rebel hideout, your team of four swordsmen hack their way in and dispense summary justice. These bloodbath battles in the confines of deformable houses look likely to present a very different tactical challenge from the more open missions which take place in the countryside beyond the town.

Returning to your HQ after each battle allows you to change your clothes, equipment and the configuration of your team. A twoplayer mode is promised, but no details are available as of yet.

If Genki can satisfyingly integrate squad control and the sophisticated swordplay of its earlier titles, then *Fu-un Shinsen-Gumi* should do justice to one of the most spectacular periods of Japanese history.



Deployment of your team is achieved through four icon commands (attack at will, attack my target, protect me, defend our position), although it's not clear how the control scheme will be arranged





The detailed and historically accurate character design gives a great sense of camaraderie, and makes it simple to identify your men in battle

Phantom Dust

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Microsoft**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **2004 (Japan), TBC (UK)**

Sometimes you have to destroy to create. Microsoft hopes to build a loyal following from the ashes of a futuristic Tokyo



Visually spectacular, the hard-drive dependent deformable environments have partly been conceived to impress upon Japanese gamers the technological superiority of the Xbox to the PS2

After the announcements of *Magatama* and *Dinosaur Hunting*, Microsoft's assault on the reluctant Japanese market continues with *Phantom Dust* – a Japanese form of gameplay in a Japanese setting produced by Japanese developers, exclusively (so far) for a Japanese market.

Tokyo has been spectacularly ravaged, and the strange dust of the game's title has driven its inhabitants underground. Only the most daring venture topside, where they take advantage of the fractured architecture to battle against each other. Based on a card system, players must collect Skills – there are up to 300 offensive, defensive and magical moves available – and then build balanced decks that they take into battle. The fully deformable city can decide the outcome of a fight, as buildings collapse and crush those under them. Any destruction is permanent, saved onto the Xbox's hard-drive and altering the nature of all subsequent battles.

Although Microsoft is working hard on the AI, the game is geared for play against up to three human challengers. the company is hoping that multiplayer options, alongside downloadable content and updates, will mean the game fuels the uptake of Xbox Live, on which it is pinning so many of its Japanese hopes.





As well as crushing your opponent, the city can also be demolished to provide short-cuts, or used as cover against an enemy's attack

Time of Defiance

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Oxygen Interactive**
Developer: **Nicely Crafted Entertainment**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **October 10**

Fans of mammoth online games have a treat in store... the campaigns in this game can take anything up to four weeks to complete. But is time on its side?





Concerns about diminishing disposable leisure time don't seem to have affected Nicely Crafted: *Time of Defiance* requires hundreds of hours



The boxed version of the game benefits from improved visuals, but the game itself is essentially the one that's been available for download on the internet for some time now, having attracted a loyal and dedicated fanbase of would-be generals

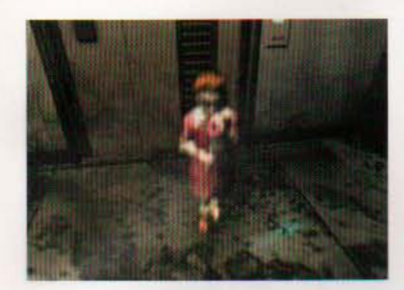
Having already been launched as a smallish download on the internet, Nicely Crafted's massively multiplayer RTS has already managed to attract 1,000 users, in spite of its mammoth scope and complexity. Individual games can take up to four weeks to complete, and although there is the option to play smaller campaigns over a weekend or the course of a week, the action doesn't stop while players are offline. If another player launches an offensive and there's nobody home, it's up to the AI to defend itself – though the size of individual empires mitigates against the success of blitzkrieg attacks while opponents are sleeping.

Now the game's set for a retail release, facilitating improved graphics and incorporating all the content updates that the developer has released so far. What's more, although it's an online game, it's perfectly playable over dial-up modems – although it's probably beyond the rather confined limits of **Edge**'s own leisure time, and it's certainly not for the faint-hearted owing to the elaborate diplomacy, trade and combat strategies that victorious generals will need to employ. But this is clearly a game that rewards players according to the amount of effort they put in. Which could diminish its massmarket appeal, but not necessarily its quality.

Nebula Echo Night

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: From Software
Developer: In-house
Origin: Japan
Release: Christmas (Japan), TBC (UK)

From Software abandons schlock-shock survival horror and prove that in space, no one can hear you whimper



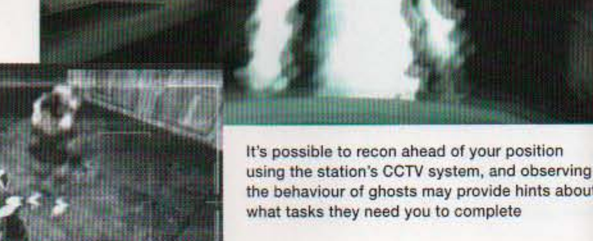


It's not yet clear if the game will require the kind of character-swapping puzzle solving seen in *Resident Evil 0* or if your fiancée will be playable

Space tourism has hardly had an auspicious birth. Moustachioed business men and the horse-faced one out of 'N-sync seem like improbable candidates to usher in a new age of intergalactic glamour. It comes as little surprise to **Edge** then, that once it does become commonplace, it's all too likely that a freak accident will destroy your shuttle, and you'll have to take refuge in a deserted Moon base with only your fiancée and dozens of disgruntled ghosts for company.

Each ghost has unfinished business on the station, and the only way to release their spirits is to complete the tasks that haunt them – or, more accurately, cause them to haunt you. In order to discover what is on their mind, it's necessary to let them briefly possess you. Contact with any ghost, however, saps your energy and it's not possible to know how dark and powerful each entity is until you come into contact with it.

It's this uncertainty that From Software is hoping will generate an atmosphere of foreboding and dread. Details are too sketchy at this stage to form any real impression of how the game will play, but there's absolutely no question that the sterile silence of the space station is admirably spooky.



It's possible to recon ahead of your position using the station's CCTV system, and observing the behaviour of ghosts may provide hints about what tasks they need you to complete

Rogue Ops

Format: PS2, Xbox, GC
Publisher: Kemco
Developer: Bits Studio
Origin: UK
Release: December

A shadowy organisation kills your husband and child. Just as well you're a highly-trained ex-Green Beret with a Lara Croft fixation then, isn't it?

Edge hates games that ask you to be stealthy and then don't give you any of the moves or equipment that you need to do so. *Rogue Ops* can't be faulted on this front, since it dispatches its sassy heroine to uncover the inevitable global conspiracy with a full compliment of night sights, shurikens and the ability to hide in cupboards... if that's what's needed. Missions range from hunting foul-mouthed terrorists through booby-trapped sewers to light-fingering cultural artefacts from high-tech museums.

The game places strong emphasis on the bloodless kill. Creeping up behind an enemy allows you to trigger a combo wheel. If you can copy the onscreen instructions in time, then you are rewarded with a balletic and silent neck-snap. Fudge them and the guard will turn, triggering the alarms and ruining your day. Some sections require just as much brainwork as footwork, and many puzzles have multiple solutions.

There's a lot that needs fixing here, ranging from the niggly (pick-ups aren't displayed clearly) to the serious (context sensitive movement commands are unreliable), but Bits has plenty of time in hand. And *Rogue Ops* certainly has all the ingredients at the ready to satisfy those who are weary of guns and gung-ho.



Bits is aiming for an adult tone throughout the game, both in the grisly actions you are sometimes required to take, and in the dialogue which is, by turns, aggressive and explicit





Climbing is only possible where a trigger is displayed. It's a system designed to simplify things, but can occasionally be a little fiddly

Ghosthunter

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **SCEE**
Developer: **In-house (Cambridge Studio)**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **November**

Previously in **E**124, **E**125

Sony brings together the third place and the fifth dimension in an abandoned school and then sends in the cops. What could possibly go wrong?



Ammunition for your guns cleverly comes from the ghosts themselves, as direct hits chip off little plasmic shards which replenish your supplies

School basements are inherently sinister places, particularly when inhabited by the uneasy souls of murdered children. As a rookie cop you find, in quick succession, a vast tank of malevolent ghosts on the loose, your feisty boss abducted and yourself recruited by a slightly camp computer as the all new Ghosthunter.

He explains to you that your task is to weaken evil spirits with your ghost-gun, frisbee your ghost-catcher into them, and watch as the bloated spectres inflate to the rough shape of a vast distorted beach ball and get sucked into oblivion. Your ability to see ghosts is due to a benevolent spirit called Astral who has taken up residence inside you, and, at certain points, can be summoned and controlled. The advantage to this is that Astral can access places you can't, but controlling her is more reminiscent of swimming than flying, which makes navigating a complicated building with stairways and lift-shafts a little claustrophobic.

For now, at least, it's the usual story of the camera needing the most work. Despite a choice of three modes, you are all too often left staring at a wall or at yourself. And despite the gorgeous quality of the character models, **Edge** would rather be able to see where it's going. Especially when where it's going is a spooky school basement.





Astral can only be summoned at set points in the game, often locatated in dingy bathrooms. As new ghosts are captured, her abilities increase

Resident Evil Outbreak

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Winter (Japan), May 2004 (UK)**

Previously in **E**118, **E**125

A new horror is stalking Raccoon City – the fragmented nature of Europe's network system







The failure of Japanese developers to bring online games to Europe is a worrying trend. While **Edge** acknowledges the difficulties, it seems that solving them is treated as an afterthought, not as an integral part of the game's design

After proving one of the more popular booths at the PlayStation Experience, enthusiasm for *Outbreak* has been dampened by doubts over whether the game will be online in Europe. Its producer, Tsuyoshi Tanaka, voiced concerns in a recent interview that due to the 'difficult' nature of Europe's network system it was impossible to guarantee online capabilities.

It will be a great blow to the game if the co-operative possibilities remain inaccessible to European players. Although, after years of lonely wandering around Raccoon City, finally having some company around doesn't seem have the impact that Capcom might have been expecting. **Edge** watched players delight in undermining the grim atmosphere of the game by stuffing their wounded team-mates into cupboards and jumping out at each other. Entertaining enough, but it perhaps adds weight to Capcom's decision not to make the game headset compatible.

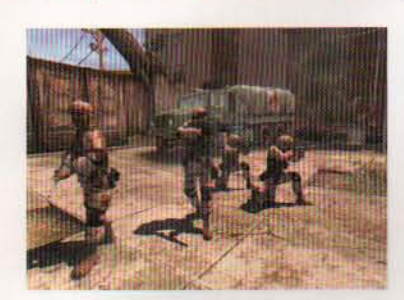
Capcom is working with Sony to try and ensure network compatibility, but will have to make a decision at some future point whether to abandon online plans and instead bring the singleplayer game out in time for its prospective May 2004 release. Should the online game prove viable, work on it could mean further delays.

Full Spectrum Warrior

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **THQ**
Developer: **Pandemic**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Spring 2004**

Previously in **E**125

Two squads, eight soldiers, two basic commands. Full Spectrum Warrior isn't nearly as simple as it looks





The focus of each soldier can be fixed individually, with a firstperson perspective showing his visual range by blurring the periphery

Move and attack. In videogaming terms it's laughably limited, but in the reality of combat zones, these simple decisions become terrifying responsibilities. *Full Spectrum Warrior* gives you no direct control over your men, requiring you to move them in methodical stages through streets where every doorway, every car, every side street contains a potentially lethal threat. Once you have selected your position, weaponry and targets, your troops carry out your orders with trained intelligence. Watching them flatten themselves against cover, or manoeuvre to stay clear of each other's line of fire makes you even more determined to see them home in one piece.

The rigid reality of the game doesn't just extend to the player having to obey real world rules of engagement about team deployment. Each soldier has his own personality, and is likely to shirk orders given by someone he dislikes, or abandon an ordered retreat to attempt to drag back the body of a fallen comrade.

Missions will vary in scope and length and, thankfully, headset enabled cooperative play is confirmed. Finally, although the very human nature of the squads makes violent death-matching unlikely, Pandemic is looking at implementing paintball-style competitive options based on actual US Army training games.



Full Spectrum Warrior works very hard to make you weigh your soldiers' lives very heavily. Positioning your two teams, selecting their targets and weaponry and coordinating your attacks produces a vast number of configurations, of which only the most tactically sound will end in success

Ford Racing 2

Format: **PS2, Xbox, PC**
Publisher: **Empire**
Developer: **Razorworks**
Origin: **US**
Release: **October 31**

The Ford Model T was the first car ever produced on an assembly line. A generic vehicle developed to appeal to the masses. Sound familiar?

Do you love Ford motor cars? Maybe you're more of a Chrysler man, or perhaps you can only get excited about Morris Minors. Whatever the case, driving games licensed from just one manufacturer is an odd concept (Sinclair's C5 apart, naturally). Here you have the complete history of Ford in one digestible package, everything from the 1955 Thunderbird to the new 2004 F-150. Surely that's got to appeal to someone, hasn't it?

It's actually quite a draw, unlocking cars from down the years and seeing how they perform on racing ovals, rally courses and city streets. Delve deep enough and you will even discover a Gran Torino, though it handles less energetically than the one featured in Empire's *Starsky & Hutch*. *Gran Turismo*'s influence is stamped all over this, at least superficially. There are driving tests to complete, there's the catch 'em all structure and the cockpit display is near-identical.

Sadly, plenty of work needs to be done both in the visual and handling departments if this is to compare favourably with the game it so indiscreetly mimics. Take off over a hump in the road and the car floats back to the ground with a less than satisfactory sense of gravity. As the old adage goes, there's still time… **Edge** just hopes this game isn't firmly rooted in a technological past.



Visually *Ford Racing 2* is competent, but the sensation of speed needs improving if it's going to seriously compete with *Gran Turismo 4*





Unlocking historic Fords is pleasingly compulsive, but the game itself needs a lot more care and attention if it's to distinguish itself from the pack

Prescreen Alphas This month's announcements and updates...

Astro Boy

Format: Game Boy Advance
Publisher: Treasure
Developer: Hitmaker/Sega




Synchronized with a remake of the original TV series, Treasure is working on an airborne laser powered adventure for Astro Boy. The old UGA team will be working on a PS2 version

Battlestar Galactica

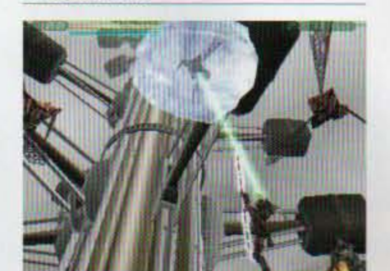
Format: PS2, Xbox
Publisher: Vivendi Universal
Developer: Warthog




Giving you the helm of a prototype Viper as a spunky young Ensign Adama, *Battlestar Galactica* promises full-scale wheeling space battles agasint the Cylons. More next issue

Chain Dive

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: SCEI
Developer: In-house




Armed with an ice blade, the hero of *Chain Dive* must defeat an invading alien horde by swinging from point to point with his plasma whip. Sort of like a high-tech Tarzan, **Edge** assumes

GunGrave OD

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Red Entertainment




Offering arenas three times the size and a refined 3D engine, the second episode of *GunGrave* also promises scenery which can be strategically destroyed with your Ultimate Demolition Shot

Doom 3

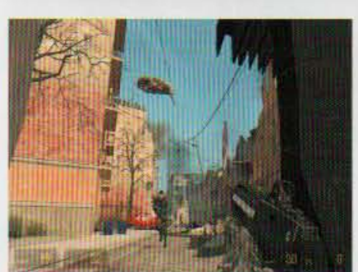
Format: PC, Xbox
Publisher: Activision
Developer: id Software




Very pretty, but also pretty predictable. *Doom 3* refuses to integrate current FPS convention, preferring to remain stuck in the 20th century. Still, a thrilling ride is at least promised

Half-Life 2

Format: PC, Xbox
Publisher: Vivendi Universal
Developer: Valve

New shots but little new information, apart from the announcement that Valve will be making the game available to download online, in several different versions, with varying amounts of extras

Kya: Dark Lineage

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Atari
Developer: Eden




The hand-to-hand sections shown at ECTS were a little pedestrian, but the vertiginous gliding sections and strong characters suggest Eden may pull its ambitious adventure together

Pikmin 2

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house




The twoplayer co-op mode is working well, with inventive level settings and a time constraint that makes things hectic rather than grimly stressful. **Edge** still fears the white *Pikmin*, though

The Touching Game

Who needs post-pub gaming when there's in-pub gaming?













Before EyeToy there was only one console which could huddle **Edge** around the screen, arms flailing and heart pounding: The Merit Force Upright System Megatouch. This long-lived pub machine has many variants, but only one masterful piece of software: *Erotic Photo Hunt*. Thousands of '80s ladies with bad hair pouting at the camera in garish lingerie. And a touchscreen.

The balance is impeccable. Each picture is partnered by a copy that hides five Photoshopped differences. Find them all within the decreasing time limit and you progress. Touch the screen where there isn't one and lose a chunk of time. Fail to find all five and it's game over. Of course there's some smutty charm in grubbing your fingerprints all over a lady's clone-stamped backside, but the nature of the photos is singularly well-suited to the gameplay. Your eye is inevitably drawn again and again to the human focus of the picture, and it requires an effort of will to scrutinise the potted palms, banisters and motorbikes that can disguise so many discrepancies. Veterans come to dread the bathrooms and cringe at the sight of ocean liners.

This is some of the purest twitch gaming available. The human visual system relies substantially on the brain's ability to detect the differences between images, and playing *Photo Hunt* at speed is like getting to spy on the private workings of your mind. Again and again your hand will shoot forward without you having any conscious awareness of where it's going to land. But when it does, a green circle blossoms around it and a cheer goes up around you. Sometimes your brain is smarter than you are.

As the high score beckons and the time gets tighter, bodies press closer, converting **Edge** into a single multi-armed monster – like the terrifying woman from *Project Zero*. As more people are drawn in, those at the back must Mr Tickle their way through the press of bodies if they want to reach the screen. Forget the tactical demands of *Ghost Recon*, no one can hope to scale the heights of erotic difference without some serious co-ordination. "Shorties at the front, beanpoles at the back... you take pants and I'll take earrings." And there's no greater show of gaming prowess than the solo five. It's a matter of keeping cool and keeping methodical, even when the smoke and screen are making your eyes fizz and your mind is plagued with doubts.

It would be easy to sneer at *Erotic Photo Hunt*, but unfounded and short-sighted, as this is gaming at its most accessible. Instinctive, convivial, rewarding and no controllers, combos or cut-scenes between a newcomer and the game. **Edge** doesn't think it's the future, but it sincerely hopes it's a part of it.





Photography: **Hiroki Izumi**

Inside…

Sega Japan

Formed in 1954 by a US businessman, Sega went on to become one of the industry's biggest players. But the last two years have not been easy for the former giant. Edge talks to a company in transition…

Hisao **Oguchi**, Sega's new president, is jocular but appears uncomfortable wearing a suit in his new role; **Yu Suzuki** acts like he's **Edge**'s favourite uncle; **Toshihiro Nagoshi** is distracted and desperate to get back to work; **Yuji Naka** is serious then sweet, even taking us on a tour of the award-winning office he helped design. It's a snapshot of Sega, but one that encapsulates the company perfectly. Hardworking, energetic and with bags of personality, but unsure about how to recapture its glory years.

Over two days, **Edge** interviews four of the firm's stalwarts, the people who helped make the Sega brand as recognised as McDonald's golden arches. A recent high-profile restructuring process has set industry tongues wagging. With Overworks merging into Wow Entertainment, Sega Rosso merging into Hitmaker and Smilebit merging into Amusement Vision, it seems to have provoked that dreaded expression of all corporations: downsizing.

Back in **E**95 **Edge** ran with the coverline "Dreamcast: finished, Sega: unstoppable". In reality the company's last few years have been difficult. Commercial failures such as *Shenmue*, *Ferrari F355 Challenge*, *Rez*, *Panzer Dragoon Orta*, *Jet Set Radio Future* and *Space Channel 5* have hit the company hard. All doom and gloom, then? Well, no, far from it. Oguchi-san's appointment as president of Sega marks a new beginning for the company, one fuelled by optimism but also tempered by the realisation that things need to change.

"When I became CEO I wanted to change the logo to mark a difference in Sega's future," laughs Oguchi-san. "However, I was told it was too much trouble. I don't like the font and I wanted something much more stylish. To give you a simple image, Sega was associated with cool and blue, like the logo. I would now like Sega to become between orange and red."

So, more like Coca-Cola than Pepsi? "Ha, yes! Good idea. Let me explain it like this. Like **Edge**, Sega is not everything in harmony – there



The original *Altered Beast* was bundled with the Mega Drive, so although it wasn't very good it was sampled by millions of gamers. Sega will be hoping this update can bring back good luck and prosperity

FAQ

Company name: Sega Corporation (Japan)
Founded: 1954
HQ: Ota-ku, Tokyo
Number of employees: 1771
Selected softography: *Phantasy Star* series, *Panzer Dragoon* series, *Sonic The Hedgehog* series, *Virtua Cop* series, *Virtua Fighter* series, *Crazy Taxi* series, *OutRun*, *Space Harrier*, *Shinobi*, *Daytona*, *Sega Rally*, *NiGHTS: Into Dreams*, *Burning Rangers*, *Shenmue I* and *II*, *Chu Chu Rocket*, *Jet Set Radio*, *Rez*
Projects in development: *Altered Beast*, *Kunoichi*, *Sega GT Online*, *Dororo*, *Phantasy Star Online III: Card Revolution*, *Sonic Heroes*

is a lot of crazy, different influences inside. Not everybody understands what **Edge** is or what **Edge** means. It is the same for Sega and only the people who understand will understand. So it is very important to have EA's model and Sega's model."

Edge is given copious documentation outlining Sega's new philosophy and structure. A4 sheets of paper headed with banners such as 'Return to Origin', 'The Excitement Company', and 'Total Entertainment'. Sega has streamlined its operation, restructured from nine R&D studios to six, and has established one holding company to oversee them all. The president believes that the new Sega will be more discriminating, smart and focused.

It's a sentiment reflected by Nagoshi-san, who now helps oversee the creative output from all Sega's divisions. "Sega was split into too many entities, which was okay at the time because it allowed each division to complete its own series and IP. But when it came to creating new content we didn't have a means to accomplish our vision. The reshuffle was about reaching a defined level of quality."

The documentation outlines a move towards a widespread (the word 'massmarket' is avoided) audience "including adults" and online and mobile content is to be a strong revenue stream "to prepare for coming home network entertainment." On paper it's all very impressive, but it's no more concrete than any PowerPoint presentation you've ever seen. Whether Sega can turn the soundbites into success is another matter.



The new *Altered Beast* lets you transform into more than eight different creatures, such as a werewolf a dragon and a minotaur. It's currently a PS2-only title and indicates Sega's new commitment to the format

Nagoshi-san summarises the new mood like this: "In the past Sega's philosophy was technology first. Second it was about passion, creativity. And third it was about marketing. It is the other way around for EA. Now for Sega, there's no emphasis on what comes first, second or third. We need a defined objective in bringing solid content to users. It's all about content now."

EA again? Unprompted, the US corporation is mentioned several times by both Oguchi-san and Nagoshi-san. It's as if Sega is both envious and disparaging of EA's publishing model. There's definitely a sense that Sega is desperate to get a foothold back in the US and there's much talk about strengthening its US and European ties. Oguchi-san admits that Sega has been

Interview: **Hisao Oguchi**



What's the most difficult decision you've had to make since you became president?
I want to make Sega stronger, to do that I have to be focused on content. To develop it, to make it stronger and to make it greater.

And how will you go about doing that?
First of all the content should be fun, should be interesting to play. So I need people that have the right ideas, the right concepts, the right mind to make such content. These people could be producers or directors. I would like to find more and to reorganise the teams around these people.

How do you spot these creative people?
There are two means: one would be to appreciate past projects, the second would be my own judgement. If I see a person and then speak to them [I can decide] according to his reaction after I have spoken to them.

Could a junior member of Sega with creative flair move rapidly up the ranks?
I was among a very creative generation with Yu Suzuki and Yuji Naka, but that was a long time ago. Now we are about 40-years-old. Even if there is a lot of potential still in terms of creativity it's very hard to answer a much younger audience. So there's a need to give a chance to a younger generation of creators. For example, when someone brings a game project in and it seems great, I will give a chance to these new people to make it and in two or three years' time to become a director. I understand that Sega needs to answer some market needs, but that's not all. I have to give chances to people who have a very strong will to make games. For example, *GTA* was not really an answer to a marketing need but the strong will of a group of people to make such a charismatic game.

Would Sega be happy producing big selling games at the expense of originality?
For the moment the US market is at the centre of the games industry. In the US realistic games are popular. Violent, political. This is a strong trend, but I think too much reality might make people bored. I think that realism cannot be applied to every kind of game. I want to focus on originality. If not, the videogame will become a small part of a large merchandising machine. It is important for the videogame industry to develop a very strong original content besides realistic ones. Even though I am busy I play games a lot. I can't remember how many millions of enemies I have killed by pressing a button with my finger.

When is Sega going to start developing for PS3 and Xbox2?
Of course I have spoken to Sony and Microsoft about PS3 and Xbox2. But it is not clear if users are going to change massively to these new consoles in the near future. Concerning PS3 and Xbox2, I don't feel as if there is any new feature to trigger a similar renewal for users. So for the moment I am not really in a hurry to jump onto these new consoles. At the moment, the current platforms are more than sufficient. Until now the hardware cycle was three or four years. We had sprites with 2D then polygons with 3D then followed with complex textures and DVD. But when we talk about the next generation of consoles it's all about improving CPU speeds and it's not clear what's new in this hardware. So from the consumers' point of view, why would they want to renew their console?

Hisao Oguchi
president

focused on Japan too much in recent years; its games now need to appeal more to western tastes. Alongside games such as *Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg* and *Phantasy Star Online III: Card Revolution* it is not unsurprising to see potential blockbusters such as *ESPN NFL Football* and *ESPN NHL Hockey* in its line-up.

So it's back to origins, yet mindful of market considerations? The truth of Sega's new philosophy is difficult to pin down. Indeed, Suzuki-san believes that the new economical, efficient structure will itself inculcate a new era of success. "It is not as complex as having a philosophy," he says. "Oguchi-san's style is very simple and it is much better. He is much more concerned about the developer, so every decision comes from the development side. It is easier to work in this system for me."

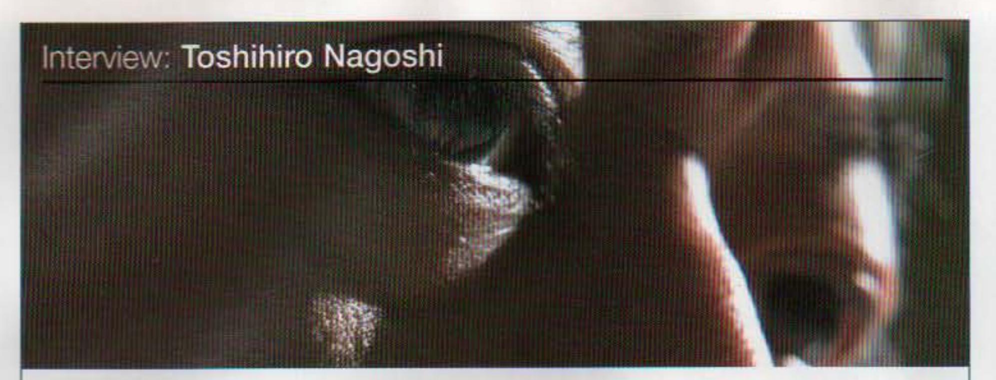
But is there a contradiction at the heart of Sega? The young president (Oguchi-san is only 43) constantly stresses how Sega must go back to basics and initiate a new era of simple, fun and original games, while concurrently tapping into new revenue streams, including outsourcing IP to foreign developers and capitalising on licences. The president realises that getting his workers to do both will be difficult. "If I had the bad idea of imposing Spider-Man or Harry Potter on my teams, everyone would quit," he laughs.

Which brings **Edge** onto *Shenmue*. It's no secret that Suzuki-san's opus was one of the most expensive videogames ever produced and despite the fact that it remains one of the most wonderful videogame experiences available it bombed at retail. **Edge** asks Suzuki-san a straight question: will *Shenmue III* ever be made? There's no firm answer. A hush descends on the room as PR representatives shuffle in their seats. A rather embarrassed



Sega is committed to online gaming and wants to develop innovative and successful titles for mobile handsets. It also wants *Sega GT Online* to be the first networked car-based driving sim









Are you involved in the marketing approach of Sega games?
Along with Naka-san I am at the top of the development process. Along with checking that development is going well, we are in charge of deciding which projects to develop or not. In that perspective we have a lot of control over the coming Sega line-up. Our task is to evaluate if a project should be developed or not but also to see if it meets our original expectations. If the game is not marketable or is not delivering the right content we would cancel it.

At what stage in the game's development would the game be cancelled?
Before it was largely about comment and advice. There was not such a harsh and precise process like now. It's not that simple. We will not reject a game simply because it is not going to sell. When we have a game project, it may have good ideas, so we would give it money and let the development start, during the one- or two-year process we would like to keep it on the rails. Not going in five directions. But if we have one big problem, like a technical problem we would like to keep the project alive by changing the studio or calling for an outside developer that is more experienced in a particular aspect of game development. We would not kill it, we would do what we can to achieve maximum quality.

What has the response to *F-Zero* been like in Japan?
The feedback has been great, both from light and core users. People seem to really like the internet ranking system.

Some believe there is a bug in the game, referred to as the 'snake technique'. What's the truth about this?
It's not a bug. It was put in intentionally. On Nintendo 64 there were similar techniques with drifting. I thought a long time about whether or not to put this feature into the game, then I realised that a number of users who are speed junkies would be really sad if there was no such technique in the GameCube version. However, this technique is still hard to do and it is not possible on every circuit.

But doesn't this unbalance the ranking system?
Yes indeed. I know this can damage the ranking system. We had the idea to try and locate who was using the technique and who wasn't, by having two parallel rankings. Yet it is a technique among all the permitted techniques so we decided to just have one ranking.

Can we expect another *Super Monkey Ball*, perhaps an online version?
I know that the series has room for three games, but not for the moment.



The novelty of *Sonic Heroes* is that you can instantly change between the protagonists, Amy, Knuckles and Sonic, to defeat enemies and overcome puzzles

Suzuki-san shrugs his shoulders, looks down at the table and eventually says, "Not yet."

The reaction is understandable. *Shenmue*, and its magnificent sequel, represent the kind of epic, big-budget risk that Sega cannot afford to take any more. That's not to say the game will never be made, but Suzuki-san's curt answer indicates that it won't be put into production any time soon. **Edge** wonders if Ryo will ever get to avenge his father's murder, or forever remain in his Guilin cave.

But **Edge** is also aware that sacrifices must be made if Sega is to grow stronger. Put yourself into Oguchi-san's suit. Would you take such a high-profile risk when all the evidence suggests your game is going to make another loss? Yet he's keen to ameliorate such disappointment by stating that the restructure will not stymie innovation at Sega. When talking about *Rez* he's passionate. "I think there is a lot of room for this kind of game. Normally, we wouldn't make [a game like *Rez*] again if it fails to sell, but since I now decide what appears in Sega's line-up I will evaluate how much originality and new entertainment the game would bring to the industry."

If you're still confused about what Sega's new outlook is, and how it significantly differs from the previous philosophy then you're not alone. Apart from a reshuffle and a tightening of the belt it's clear that Sega is in no hurry to alter its approach to games. Sega fans are special, loyal and fanatical, they won't stand for second best. Some would even argue – even more so than for Nintendo titles – that Sega games have a special quality. The president assures **Edge** that the Sega touch is not about to vanish. With Naka-san overseeing all of Sega's output, and Nagoshi-san effectively acting as his second in command, vibrant content is not going to fade away.

"In today's Sega games, after you play the games, users have a good feedback," reassures Nagoshi-san. "They have a good feeling about originality and a game's balance. This is particularly true for Smilebit and AV.



Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg screams Sega. It has a loveable hero, a simple yet deep play mechanic and visuals to appeal to the audience it knows best: children. However, the new president is confident that Sega can launch new properties with the ability to appeal to adults as well





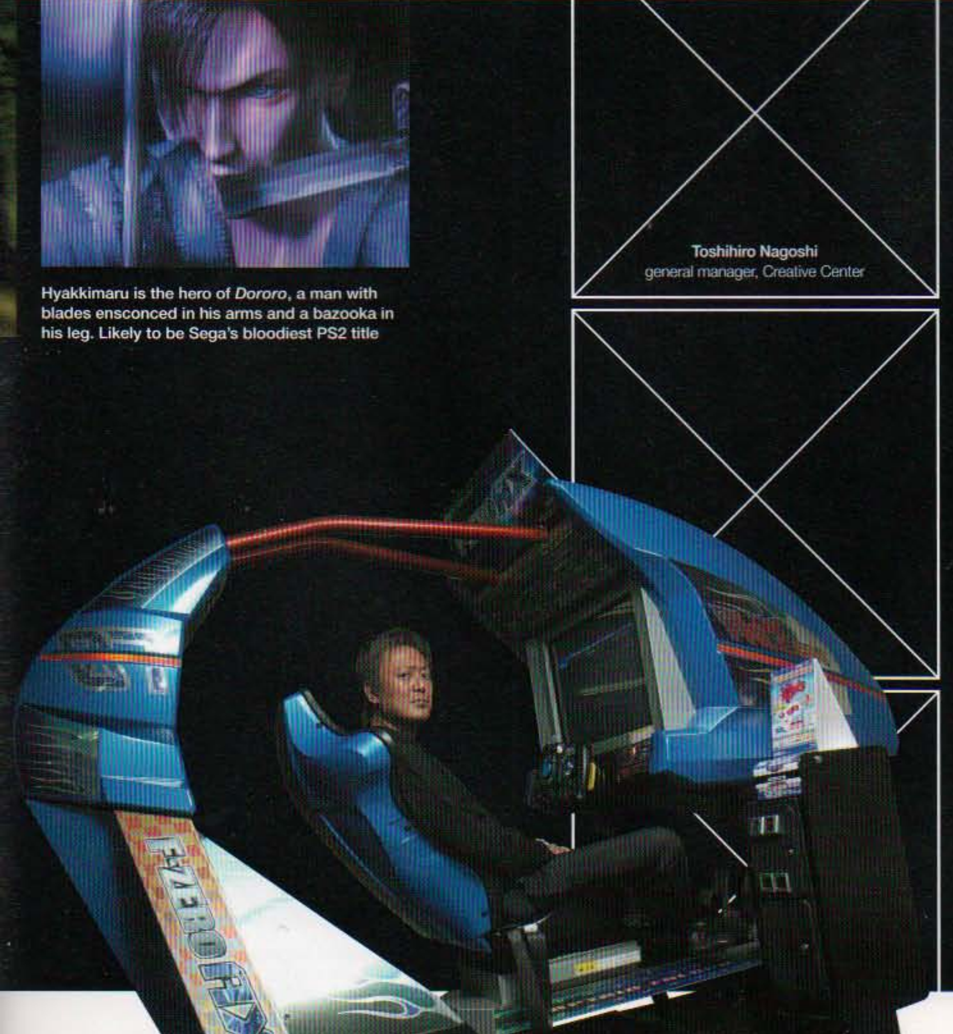






Hyakkimaru is the hero of *Dororo*, a man with blades ensconced in his arms and a bazooka in his leg. Likely to be Sega's bloodiest PS2 title

Toshihiro Nagoshi
general manager, Creative Center





Yu Suzuki
general manager, Cinematic Online

Yuji Naka
general manager, Development Control Center

What Edge has sampled of *PSOIII: Card Revolution* is nothing short of brilliant. A new visual style and deep card-battling combat should make it a worthy successor to its previous iterations. Its online nature linked with esoteric gameplay make a European release uncertain

Interview: **Yu Suzuki**



How do you feel about your new role at Sega? Were you involved in the reorganisation?
Last year I came to Sega HQ but I was still involved in AM2 work. For the moment the new division is quite small, about 30 people. I think AM2 was too big and I wanted a structure more adapted to my will and ideas. I think a structure between 50 to 120 people is the best way to create games. Now I am in the process of building this structure gradually by adding the necessary people.

Your new division, Cinematic Online suggests you will be focusing on online games. Is this the case?
Well, it is a temporary name. There are two ways to go with online. One is to adapt games for online. In order to do that, we need to have a branch office worldwide to get direct feeling from games and users. I cannot create online games here, without living in the US. For *Daytona 500*, for instance, I went to a Daytona race five times to create that game.

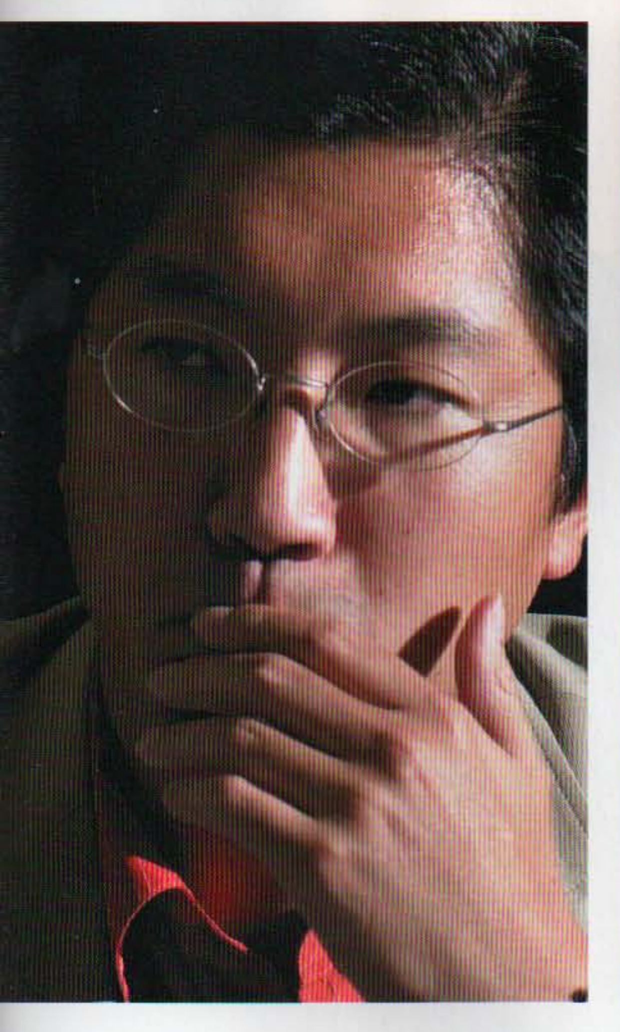
Do you prefer the old days of a purer gameplay experience? Aren't games too complex now?
I love older games, *Wakka Wakka Mole* [laughs]. I can play old games on my cell phone. I think games have got very difficult for the public. I think simple games are better, but it's a fashion, like car shapes.

The problem I face is not what kind of games to make, but how to push people to buy these games. We want to make the games more appealing before users see and play the game, and to have a stronger marketing approach."

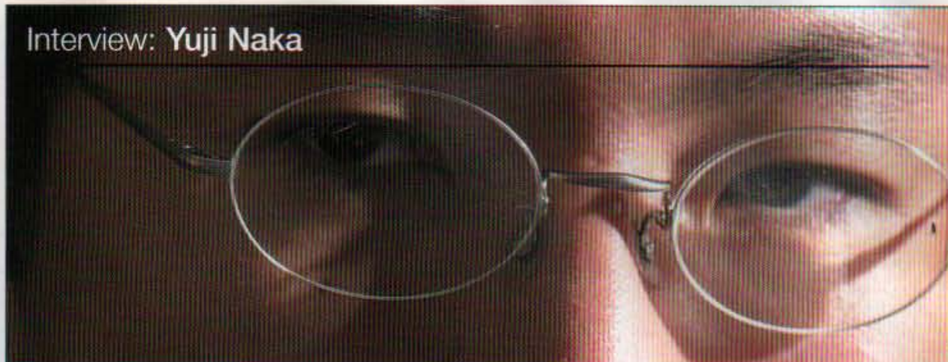
Each of the studio heads hints that original IP is already being created but, crucially, Sega is not about to make the leap to PS3 or Xbox2 any time soon. "I am not in a hurry to jump on to these consoles," confirms Oguchi-san. Sega's cautious approach is understandable in light of the various mergers that have been



Kunoichi is the female counterpart to *Shinobi*'s Hotsuma. It won't be massively different but greater agility and new moves are promised



Interview: **Yuji Naka**



Documentation suggests that Sonic Team is making games for light users. What does that mean and how do you differentiate between light and hardcore users?
If you look at Sega's structure in total it looks like the company makes games for light users. But in reality it's difficult to understand what is a light game and what is a hardcore game. For example, if we make a game that answers fans expectations, does that mean that we are doing a game for hardcore users? Videogames are not exclusively for adults but also for children. If a game appeals to a wide audience from children to adults, and this makes it a light game then so be it.

Oguchi-san said Sega will take on more licences. But the people we've spoken to don't want to deal with licences. How are you going to make licensed games if no one wants to make them?
I would like to keep at least half of the projects original, but I would like to use licences. Before when we made a truly original game it would sell, but as games went to licences it became much more difficult. I recall that when I made *Sonic* and Miyamoto-san made *Mario* we were directly challenging the power of the film industry. Right now I think games are more like an advertisement for movies.

You have collaborated with Nintendo many times now. Can we expect Mario and Sonic to get together in a game?
Yes, why not? I think from now on there will be more chances to speak to Miyamoto-san and think of new ways of collaboration. But it is not just for Nintendo, the entire industry is moving like this, so perhaps there will be very interesting projects in the future. Recently Miyamoto-san visited us and met Sonic Team, which was very exciting.

Would you like to develop another *NiGHTS* game?
I see *NiGHTS* as a licence. When dealing with such a licence from the past it is quite a lot of work, but I would like to use *NiGHTS* to reinforce Sega's identity, yes.

Where do you want to take online games in the future?
I think it is exciting to play with other people in the same world. Each day the game is different from a normal game, when you are doing the same thing over and over. I hope that in the future network games are just called games. No one will think about the network anymore.

mooted and then broken. The president is more interested in tapping into the burgeoning Asian PC market and creating titles for mobile technology, including Nokia's N-Gage.

The company's TGS/ECTS line-up represented the last breath of games from the 'old' Sega. The superb *Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg* reflects Sega's back-to-basics philosophy; it's pure and fun, but not likely to represent the blockbuster Sega needs. While *PSOIII* is a brilliant card-battling variation on Naka-san's opus but, again, it will only appeal to a niche audience and is unlikely to see a release in Europe. Forthcoming titles, including *Sonic Heroes*, *Kunoichi*, *Dororo* and *Altered Beast* may go down well with Sega stalwarts, but **Edge** would be surprised if any stay top of the charts for any lengthy period.

The new Coca-Cola of game publishers? Oguchi-san is nothing if not ambitious. But with a stronger European arm and a realisation that the market has changed unrecognisably since its Mega Drive days, **Edge** remains hopeful that one of the world's most passionate game makers will be resurgent. Just don't expect hardware any time soon.



No, not Sonic Team's recreation area but the office where games are cooked up and ideas are added to the Sega creative stew. Yuji Naka is now the general manager of the Development Control Center (essentially he's responsible for Sega's quality control)


SEGA
TM
www.sega-europe.com



Inside…

Sega Europe

The last time Edge visited Sega Europe it was still a testbed for Dreamcast software. Now the white devkits are gone, replaced by multiformat demo pods and a new-found optimism for the future…

Sega's Japanese reinvention clearly carries repercussions for the European branch. But then Sega Europe's undergoing a rebirth of its own, moving from a minimised life-support operation to full-on publishing. And not just as a distributor for the Japanese products, either – its acquisition of Team 17's *Worms 3D* and Climax's *Warhammer Online* surprised many, but the company's vision is somewhat broader than that. Here, COO **Naoya Tsurumi** and European marketing director **Matthew Woodley** explain Sega Europe's statement of intent…

Why the move into publishing?

Naoya Tsurumi: As you know, we decided to quit the Dreamcast business at the start of 2001. Coming out of that, our studios were only experts for our own platform. To be honest, it's very difficult to simply switch to another platform. But of course, Sega had to survive, and struggled to convert the existing Dreamcast titles. That's what we continued to do for one and-a-half years, conversions of existing games. To be honest, it's not enough. And that's why it wasn't the right time to relaunch in Europe, as it's a difficult market. We wondered if we could survive with that kind of title, as a distributor.

So, we made a deal with Infogrames and Sony to distribute our products at the start of 2001. The contract was two years, and that's how long we had to change the studio, the market, and so hopefully we can start again. We hope, of course. We're not 100 per cent certain. Of course, there were so many discussions at headquarters – some people say yes, some people say no – but my understanding was that, while we're a publisher, while we're a developer, why not sell our products? Why not communicate with the consumer direct? When there's someone between you and the consumer, it's very very hard to communicate with them, almost impossible.

Matthew Woodley: From a European perspective, it's all about getting close to the consumer. So having our own operation here, having producers, marketing people and research departments, just means we can get a far better Sega perspective on what's happening in the European marketplace. And that just makes it easier for us to make better decisions on games we're going to launch in two or three years time. It's all about shortening the chain.

It appears there's much more optimism around Sega Europe than there was, say, three years ago.

NT: Yes, definitely.

MW: I think over the last couple of years we've realised how the market has changed. And what we've been doing, like Tsurumi-san says, is making internal changes to allow us to go forward. And that's taken time; these things take time to do, but in terms of the level of optimism we've got a small publishing company here in Europe, with the back up of some of the best developers in the world. Slowly we're getting some of the best developers in Europe (Climax, Team 17), so movements are into those sort of areas, and employing new people, getting a proper marketing and sales department. It's great, because you've got the Sega brand behind you, which still has a lot of power, and some of the best developers in Europe, and so many experienced people... so you get that feeling of optimism. We're all working to a goal for Sega Europe, but we've got a long way to go. It's still early days.

You've been acquiring thirdparty titles – *Worms*, *Warhammer*. How do you go about deciding which are the right products? Which ones fit with Sega's image?

MW: There are a lot of ways of looking at Sega; where we're at, and where we want to go. If you were to ask someone in a research group what they think Sega is, they're gonna think historically, arcade, maybe platform, quite colourful, quite bright, quite family friendly in a way. But the actual reality is quite different in terms of the overall content. We've got games like *Rez*, *House of the Dead*, games with huge depth like *PSO*. But still, in terms of the perception, what we're doing is we're looking at and acquiring those sorts of games that give us a more rounded release schedule. That's the objective. So, to make amazing games like *Rez*, but then to make sure that, as well as being as good as *Rez*, and as innovative, they're commercial. They're going to be demanded by the market.

Now, something like *Warhammer*… that's an interesting one. Because it's exactly what isn't perceived as a Sega game. If we were to have launched it at the end of last year, or the beginning of this, I think people would have had trouble considering it as a Sega game. But over the last six months, and over the next nine months, we're marking it very heavily as a Sega game. I mean, the company has a fantastic pedigree with regards to content. This is slightly different, because for a start it's a PC game, where we're not renowned for huge success. And that's an area we need to work on, and *Warhammer* is definitely a bridge to that. It's very much our intention to have more titles in online and MMRPG environments, but also PC, as well. And post *Warhammer* launch you'll see other titles from Sega of a different genre, but similar in terms of being PC and MMORPG. We've got stuff in Japan that's being developed for that purpose at the moment.

Is this move towards the PC just for Europe?

NT: Basically Europe and the US. Because the PC market is basically the size of the console market. But there are too many titles, so we want to focus on the very good ones. And we want to make titles, to be honest, that are more profitable, compared with the console.

Photography: Martin Thompson

Will you be handing some of Sega's IP over to thirdparty European developers?
NT: Yeah, that's one idea. We have a few ways of producing titles. Number one is the studios in Sega Japan and Sega America, and the titles that come from there. Number two is that we acquire existing IP titles, like *Worms*. Number three, we want to utilise our existing IP, which will be developed by studios in Europe. So we're just starting to talk to some of European Studios. Up to today, *Crazy Taxi*, *Virtua Tennis*, etc have been developed by our Japanese studios, which makes them Japanese. There's something different in games developed by European people, some culture thing, something we definitely need.

So do you think that Sega Japan's games might be too Japanese to get the massmarket European success you crave?
MW: It's not really like that. For example, an IP might be managed by a Japanese studio, but we might want to take it to Europe. The Japanese title will still be sold worldwide.

But there's definitely potential there. When we're talking to developers we're looking at what their technology's like, what their IPs are, what they want to create, but also we're thinking about how they can work our own existing properties. There's potential with brands like the ones Sega already have to move them into so many different areas beyond the traditional PlayStation2, Xbox, GameCube, PC development. There's a world of opportunity in Flash, mobile, online, GBA, whatever; there's big potential there.

NT: I think there are three formats... one, the console. Two, the PC and three, mobiles, including the PDA.

MW: And then you've got things like *EyeToy*. I mean, if a team in Japan is busy working on an existing franchise, you... well, without much imagination you can see some of our games would work really well on *EyeToy*. We've had consumers suggesting that to us, which is very positive and exciting for us. You could try that technology with, for example, *Virtua Tennis*, something like that. So that's an area we're very keen to look into for future products.

Do you regard *EyeToy* as a separate platform?
MW: Well, it is in a way, isn't it? It requires a different thought process, different innovation.

Will we see some change at Sega in order to bring about the commercial success the company obviously craves?
NT: Our Japanese and European studios... they will not change anything. They guarantee to us that we're developing the best quality titles. That will not change at all. Even developing games in Europe, Japan won't allow us to release games below what they regard as quality games. They'll say no. Like you say, under the Sega brand you have to reach an outstanding level. The quality control is worldwide.

So do games acquired by Sega Europe have to meet with Japanese approval?
NT: Not exactly. But at every milestone they check things – for example *Worms*, or *Headhunter*, currently in development at a Swedish studio. They'll say if it's good or bad. We're always in communication with Sega Japan. Otherwise it would be very difficult if Sega Europe decided something and Sega Japan went in a completely different direction; that would be a nightmare.

What advantages does being a software only company have over the Dreamcast days?
NT: It's very scary. We have many different IPs, which presents a great opportunity. The problem today is how we can maximise that IP. So actually Sega is struggling to work out how we can do that. One idea could be to get a European developer to help us.

Any disadvantages?
MW: Getting devkits, maybe. We'd have the first devkits if we were working with our hardware!

NT: Yeah. One is that today, the PS2 dominates the market – 75 per cent or so, right? All developers and publishers have had five or six years of experience at developing games for PS2. We only started two years ago, and that means we're quite disadvantaged. But of course I believe we have a lot of very talented people who can catch up very quickly. And when we move to the next platform, we'll all be at the same stage, and well, we *have* to be big.

Does the multiplatform status of Sega Europe allow the company to be more outspoken on issues facing the industry?
MW: Well, in a way. To be honest, we've not been in a situation to comment on the industry because we've been so busy getting the company, and the new vision together. But in as much as we've got very good relationships and partnerships with all the hardware manufacturers, and we understand their business and they understand ours. And in that respect we're slowly finding our feet more and more in terms of industry perception and industry movement. In terms of commenting on the industry and where it's going, on price changes and whatever, we'll slowly become more vociferous in that area. But it's one of those things where we're building up, albeit from this fantastic bedrock, and we need to get our own house in order first.

It must be an ideal position to be building from, though...
MW: Definitely beats starting from scratch. And from a marketing perspective, the Sega name opens far more doors than a new name would, or indeed some other names. We've already announced some major deals with people like McDonalds – there's a happy meal promotion going on in Germany at the moment with LCD games. But Sega in terms of a brand, with *Sonic* and *Monkey Ball* and those titles, it makes it easier than it is for other companies, because we've got a history and it's a positive brand association.

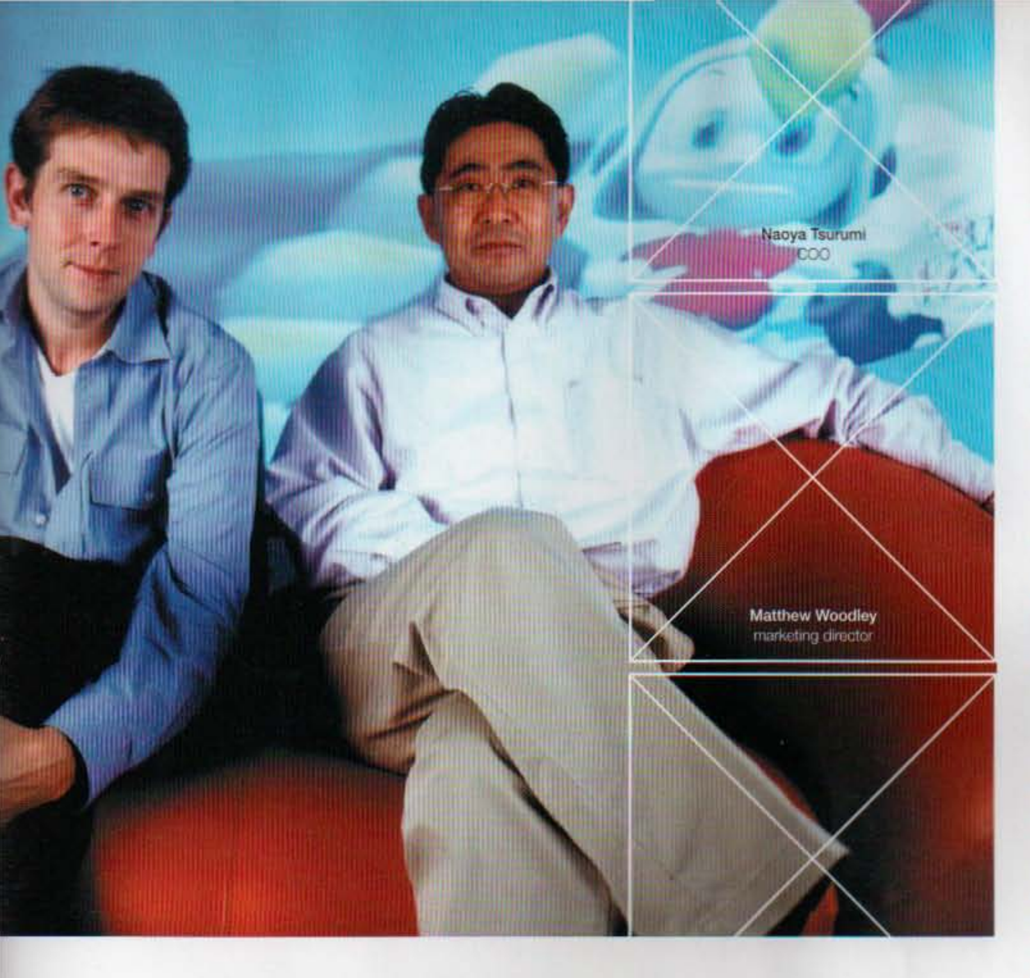
Conversely, though, there must be a significant amount of pressure on you.
MW: Yeah, I think a lot of people are waiting to see what we're going to be doing, especially from within the industry. They know we're planning something, that we're up to something. We're launching games that have been well received and well reviewed, so far. In Leipzig last week, *Warhammer* and *Worms* went down an absolute storm. And then we're







(From left) *Headhunter Redemption*, *Warhammer Online* and *Worms 3D*. Three very different games and three titles that are seen as crucial to the future success of Sega as a thirdparty developer and publisher. It seems, after all these years, it still takes ages to be this good...



backing that up with things like *Sonic Heroes*, and *Billy Hatcher*, which is a work of genius. People are seeing that there's a build up, a momentum there. But at the end of the day it's a business and people are still going to judge us by our results. It's going to be a situation where, well, we're a profitable company at the moment and we need to stay there and increase that profit. That's what we'll be judged by, especially in terms of what we're going to do in Europe. In two years time we'll know if this has been a success.

Who do you consider your biggest rivals?
MW: Well, to be honest with you, when I talk with developers about what we're competing against, we're competing against our peers in the industry, but also against the amount of free time the consumer has and what they're going to do with that time. And also for their money, and what they're going to do with that money. Are they going to go shopping, or are they going to play games? Are they going to buy trainers, or the new *Sonic*? That's what we're up against, especially from a marketing perspective, and a content perspective.

Beyond that, I think it's more the individual titles rather than publishers. Obviously we have a huge amount of admiration for Electronic Arts and their release schedule, the demand they create for their titles through brilliant software and great licensing. But you get a window around each game where you might be launching against something that isn't another *FIFA* or *Harry Potter*, but is still big enough to get shelf space and provide competition. It's not just the Activisions of this world, but the individual titles. Does that make sense? It's so time-sensitive; there's PR, marketing, TV... and then you find out that Game X, say *Half-Life 2*, has come forward a couple of weeks, or *Pro Evo 3*, and it doesn't matter that *PES3* is a very different game to *Sonic Heroes*, it's going to take money out of the marketplace. We've got an in-house research department, and it's possibly the most important thing we look at on a day-to-day basis, getting that information. Without that info about what other people are doing, where the trends are going, when other people are releasing products, is like pushing water uphill. It's vital for us.

***Pokémon*, and all its associated tie-in toys and catch-'em-all spinoffs, has been a huge help to Nintendo. Will Sega Europe be looking to expand beyond developing, publishing and distributing games?**
NT: *Sonic* is a possibility, but the thing is... *Pokémon* is a very new IP, maybe five years. When you look at *Mario*, he's the same as *Sonic*. How exciting to the consumer is that? Sometimes we try and establish brands for *Sonic*, but he has had a very long history. When we launched *Sonic* it was ten years ago, everyone was excited. Today, unfortunately, it's not like that. So maybe we have to look for new characters, maybe *Super Monkey Ball*...

You've said you admire EA's roster; they're famous for depending heavily on sequels and franchises. Is this a strategy Sega Europe are looking to adopt?
NT: Yeah, it's basically that we know it's not hard to produce a sequel, step by step, but that with a sequel sales go down. Of course it depends on the quality, you have to be careful about that. *Sonic* is our aim; that's how we can dominate the platforms, be it PS2, whatever. We want *Sonic* to dominate.

Would you agree that for some people Sega is Sonic and Sonic is Sega...
NT: Yes, exactly.

So that's something you're going to build on?
NT: So we have to succeed there. We just have to. As for other sequels, we're planning to try again in the football market next year.

The football market's very crowded, though.
NT: Not crowded. There are only two titles.

Not sure that people at Sony would agree with you on that point...
NT: Yeah... Well, we're doing very well with the football management game on PS2 in Japan. The action football game market is very big, and the management one small. But maybe in two or three years the market will have grown, and then the two will merge together. Today it's very difficult for Sega to come in from the action side, but it's much easier to access from management, where we have a title in Japan, that we can convert to the European tastes of the game. And when we've done that, convert to the PC, then to the mobile...

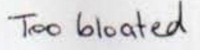
What do you think are the two or three standout titles of the next year? What will define Sega Europe as a publisher?
MW: Well, there are a few, to be honest. In terms of what we've announced: *Sonic Heroes*, obviously. *Worms 3D*. *Headhunter Redemption*. And *Warhammer Online*.

Do you think they make up Sega Europe's mission statement?
MW: I think it's the next step on the path to where we're going. We're not going to shout about where we'll be in five years, and what our release schedule will look like then. But I think you can get an indication by looking at it this year. The *Warhammer* licence might be a departure from where we've been before, but with imagination you can plot a route in terms of the sort of areas we'll also be expanding into. *Sonic* and *Monkey Ball* and those type of games remain and will continue to be the core part of our business. But what we're doing is expanding into other areas which other people are currently owning, and competing against them with better software. The least we can do is to make the best games, and that's what the company's focused on doing. If we do that, and market them correctly, then our market share should grow as well, with the products.

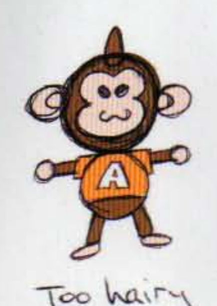








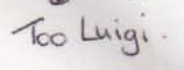






















Drunkalunka
Too flat
NO Xboxes
Too bloated
Muppet?
Almost.
Buzz lightyear?
Too bald
Too hairy
Too skinny
Maybe...
Good
Too Luigi.
Scared.
YES!
More bananas
Too creepy
Too Dead X
Shhhh!
Too manly
Spock?
Good hair.
No Pandas
Train
No Robots
NO WAY
Round!
NO Aliens
Rick Waller
Aerodynamics

Part of the Process

In the second part of its dissection of the nuts and bolts of game development, **Edge** considers pre-production – the point where inspiration become code incarnate

































In his seminal book on the US computer industry, 'Accidental Empires' (aka 'How the Boys of Silicon Valley Make Their Millions, Battle Foreign Competition and Still Can't Get a Date') **Robert X Cringely** breaks down the growth stages of a technology company into three waves. Long-term consistency can only be maintained with the introduction of managers who enjoy the drudgery of administration and financial control. Growth of a successful startup into solid incorporation will be driven forward by engineers who rely on weight of numbers and planning to refine a company's product line.

Top of the apex, however, are the commandos who provide the initial spark. Working hard, fast, cheap and dirty, they hit the beachhead under cover of darkness, taking ideas and creating products whose very existence will make the competition obsolete. "The commandos," Cringely quips, "make creativity a destructive act."

And this, fundamentally, is the heart of pre-production, in game development or any other industry. Like mixing nitric and sulphuric acid with glycerine, shaking it up a bit and then throwing in sawdust for stability, pre-production is the raw harnessing of creative forces into a rough package that, when refined, will hopefully blow your competition (and audience) away.

"Pre-production is messy, scrappy and appears unstructured," reckons **Nalin Sharma**, of one-man-band developer Puzzlekings. And he should know what he's talking about having spent three years working part-time in the pre-production phase of a game, with a working title of *Cubic Juggler*, which eventually coalesced into his debut, *ZooCube*. "Everyday I'd wake up thinking, how can I make this game better?" he recalls. "It was a complete labour of love. I'd be sitting on the train to work and thinking about it. For me, that was the challenge; I was the only person in the world working on that game."

Of course, not everyone is as committed as Sharma and that is one of the downsides of the unstructured nature of this process. According to Cringely for example, when US company 3Com was developing the first circuit card that would allow PCs to communicate over ethernet networks, its lead commando was Ron Crane. The very future of 3Com depended on his finishing the ethernet card on time, since the company was rapidly going broke. No ethernet card, no money; no money, no company. In the middle of this high-pressure assignment, Crane just stopped working on the ethernet card, leaving it



Lessons learned from pre-production: 1
Neverwinter Nights
Publisher: **Infogrames** ■ Developer: **BioWare** ■ Format: **PC** ■ Year: **2002**

Complex roleplaying games such as *Neverwinter Nights* require tens of thousands of hours of testing, so it's vital that the developer has a playable prototype up and running as quickly as possible. For this reason, one of the key tasks of BioWare's pre-production team was getting the most important game systems playable. However, in its haste to do this, it didn't always spend enough time working out the full specification of those systems. The result was what were thought to be fully-featured prototypes were missing key gameplay aspects. Unfortunately this was only realised late in development, which meant valuable time was taken trying to fill in these gaps. The prototypes were also found to be too focused on technology, which had an impact on the quality of the interface as well as the game's plot. Lesson learned: BioWare will reuse the *Neverwinter Nights* toolset as a rapid prototyping tool to fix the story of future projects much earlier in the development process.



Early prototyping of technology only proved to be partly successful for *Neverwinter Nights* and was costly in terms of time spent filling in the gaps





The final stage of *ZooCube*'s pre-production involved deciding on a more visually-striking theme for the game. The choice eventually boiled down to sweets or animals; Nalin Sharma decided on animals and *ZooCube* was the result

unfinished on his workbench and compulsively turned to finding a way to measure the sound reflectivity of his office ceiling tiles. "That's the way it is sometimes when commandos get bored," says Cringely.

And that sort of thing happens in game pre-production too. "The problem is it's just too much fun making games," laughs **Jamie Walker**, a producer at Argonaut, who's currently knee-deep in cute-but-angry platform slasher *I-Ninja*. The problem, he explains, arises from the sheer exuberance of working on a new game. "You always start a project with lots of energy," he says. "Pre-production is almost like the first week of a new job. Everyone's talking about ideas, everyone's starting stuff and then moving onto something else. You can bet the particle effects will be done first because that's cool, but collision detection and the camera system will be left until last because they're boring. Suddenly, if you're not careful, pre-production has ended and all you've got is an enormous pile of half-finished cool stuff lying around."

Clearly that's not the ideal but historically it's often been the way games were made. Back when the members of a development team could be counted on the MD's fingers, pre-production didn't really matter. It was possible to sit around for a couple of months chewing the fat, and then throw people at a project during the final crunch and fix the problems. In fact many studios had people sitting around full-time, although they generally referred to them as the core R&D team. Operating far from the rigours of deadlines, they could brainstorm and play around with technology until something stuck, or the company went bust.

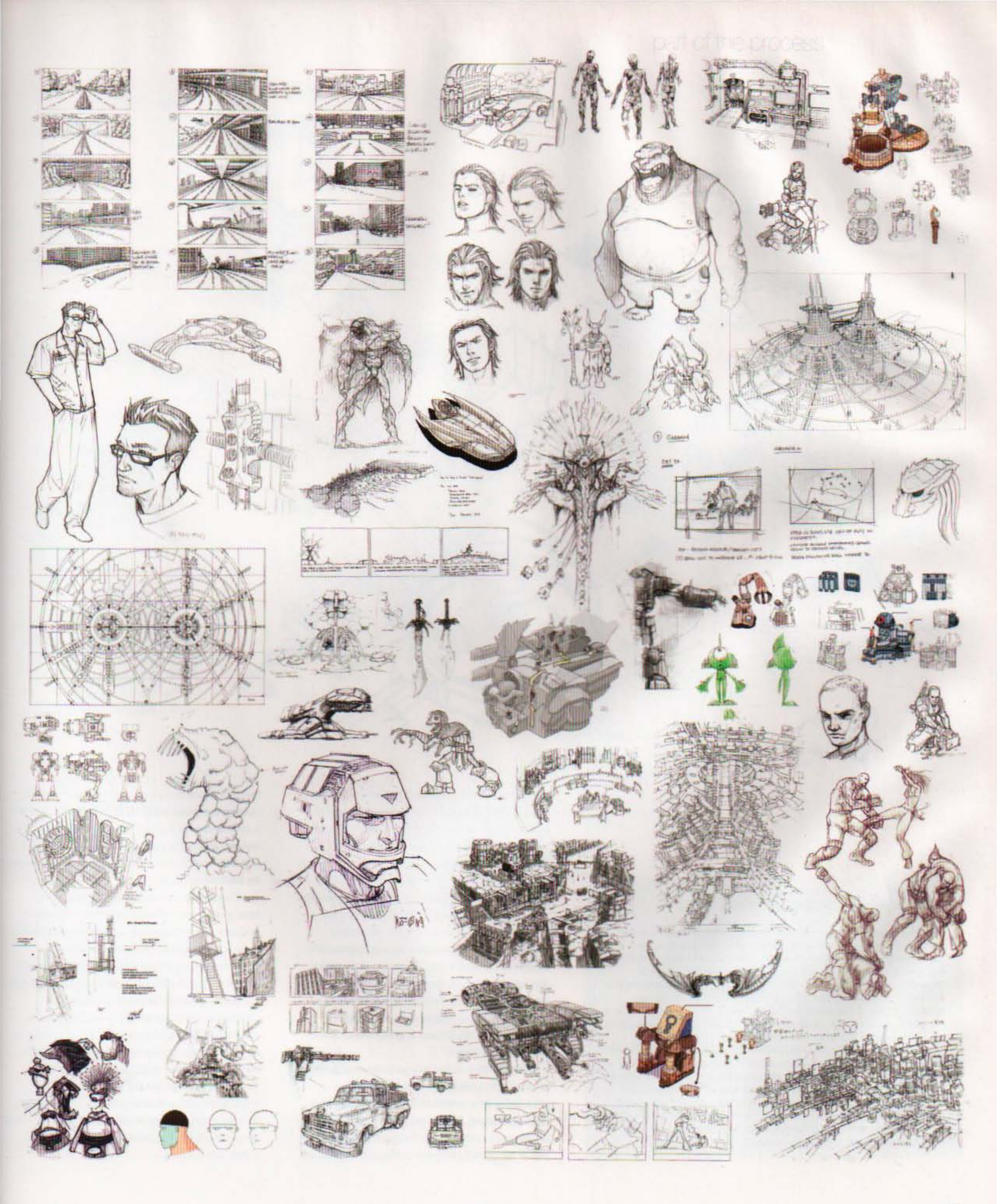
And for those lucky individuals who have total control over their output, this is still how many of the most innovative games have come into being. One example is the long gestation of *The Sims*. Inspired by Christopher Alexander's book 'A Pattern Language', combined with a program for decorating dolls' houses, Will Wright added and removed components over a period of years, until he felt the concept was refined enough to go into pre-production. Even then, it took two years for Wright, working with his lead programmer Jamie Doornbos, to design a behavioural AI system that would allow them to simulate the daily activities of the sims.

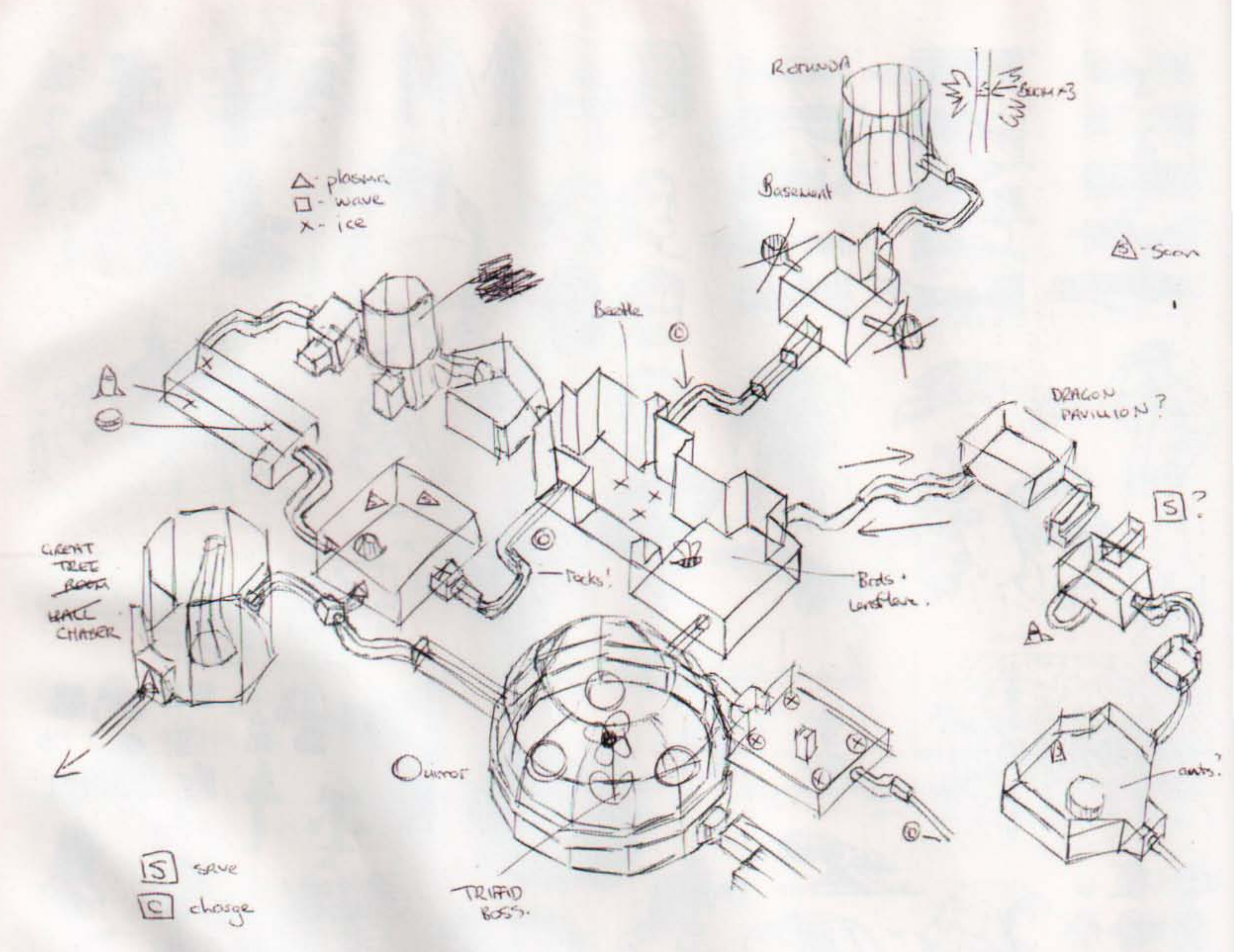
In the UK, probably the most celebrated examples of such methods were Bullfrog and DMA Design. Both studios had a great reputation for creativity, although a lesser one for shipping games on time. Instead, they focused on gameplay above all else. The problem was that for every success this free-flowing approach generated – *Dungeon Keeper*, *Grand Theft Auto* – there were another couple of failures – *MIST*, *The Space Game*, *Body Harvest*, *Attack* – which either failed in the marketplace or never even made it that far.

"Other EA studios may spend a lot of time upfront on a game and come up with a stringent document about how it's going to be implemented. From then on it's a question of a production line implementation, but we don't want to work that way. We don't work that way," claimed one Bullfrog insider, after EA bought out the studio in 1995.

The success of EA's business model of commoditising game intellectual properties such as *FIFA*, *Madden* or *The Lord of the Rings* into regular – usually annual – instalments means, however, this is

> "Pre-production is almost like the first week of a new job. Everyone's talking about ideas, everyone's starting stuff and then moving onto something else"





exactly the way its studios and partners now work in terms of pre-production. In one sense, this sort of professionalism is good for the videogame industry. Less structured methods were clearly too inefficient to survive. What's become known as 'the EA way' is starting to raise concerns in some corners of the development scene though. As one insider, currently working on a high-profile EA project, confesses, "EA has a certain view on how pre-production should be done. Its process is well established and everyone knows you don't do much creative work, you just join the dots. The problem is that unless other publishers can come up with an alternative, and hopefully more creative way, of dealing with pre-production, the EA way is going to end up the way everyone does it."

One deviation to this is organic development – an approach currently being championed by Lionhead and its satellite studios such as Big Blue Box and Intrepid. "On *BC* we didn't have a formal pre-production stage at all," explains **Ben Cousins**, one of the game's designers at Intrepid. "Instead we had a long period of time during which we started building the game systems. There wasn't even really a point where we crossed over into production. The two processes merged. I guess you could say we only hit production when we started creating conten for the finished game."

Characterised by an overall roadmap of long-term goals, punctuated by short-term milestones and constant testing, organic development attempts to overcome the rigid constraints of formal production methodology with an iterative approach that allows a game to evolve. One key aspect of this in pre-production is the use of technology prototypes, which are quickly coded to prove a concept and then thrown away. In *BC*, for example, designer Carson Herrick developed a simple turn-based text interface using commercial scripting language Python to test the population growth mechanism of the cavemen's camp. "The best way of determining whether an idea is successful or not i simply to put it in the game as soon as possible," comments Cousins.

Before lights, camera, action...

With the budgetary constraints currently being placed on developers, some think adoption of so-called film-style production models would be a step forward, particularly for smaller developers working on innovative concepts. For, unlike games, where the delineation between the different stages of development are mere lines in the sand, film production schedules are written in concrete, or at least dollar bills. Through the stages of script-writing and optioning, through to pre-production – by which stage producers, directors and principal cast members are usually attached – production and post-production, each is formalised by contracts and increasingly large chunks of money.

The hope of new game financing bodies such as Start! Games and Capital Entertainment Group is to fund pre-production of promising game concepts, signing them up to publishers to complete production and taking an equity cut of the project in process. It's proved to be much harder than initially thought however. Start! funded several prototypes, but to date, none has been signed up. Even more straightforward projects such as the Xbox incubator program, designed to allow startups to get prototypes running on Xbox devkits, have failed to generate much interest with publishers.

Iteration is also a method favoured by Nalin Sharma. "During pre-production, you're trying to iterate your design all the time, he says. I used minimum graphics because I was trying to polish the game mechanics but all the time, you're moving between coding new features and checking if they mesh with the initial concept."

But if there is divergence on exactly how pre-production should be carried out, most developers agree on some basic guidelines. Breaking development down into four main blocks, pre-production starts after the game design is completed to a point where the basic systems and technology need to be coded for the concept to be further evaluated. Tackling the subject in Charles River Media's book 'Secrets of the Game Business', Mike Sellers of Online Alchemy establishes two goals for the pre-production process: production of a small but playable version that demonstrates the final game experience; and the reduction of any risk with respect to any technical obstacles or artistic uncertainties.



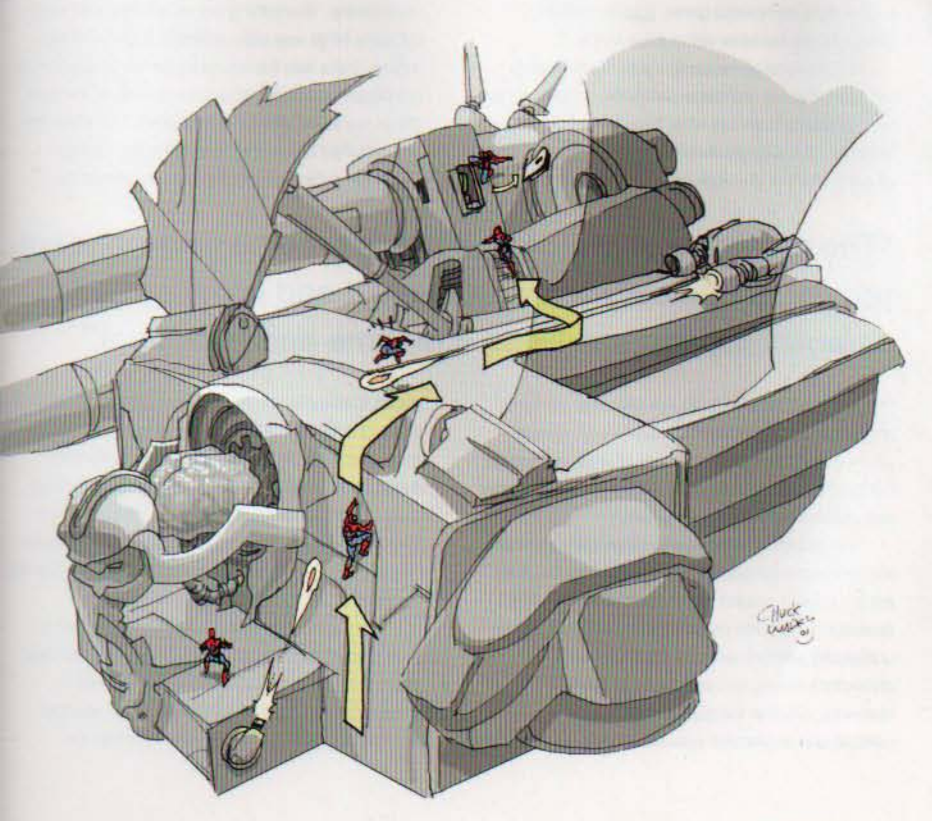
One example of the use of organic development techniques is Intrepid's *BC*. The developer used an iterative approach to attain its long-term goals



Without formal periods for pre-production and production, *BC*'s development team instead focused on reducing technological risk as early as possible via prototyping

"'If at any point [during a presentation to a publisher] you have to say, 'Now imagine...' then you need to do more work in pre-production,' cautions Ed Bartlett"

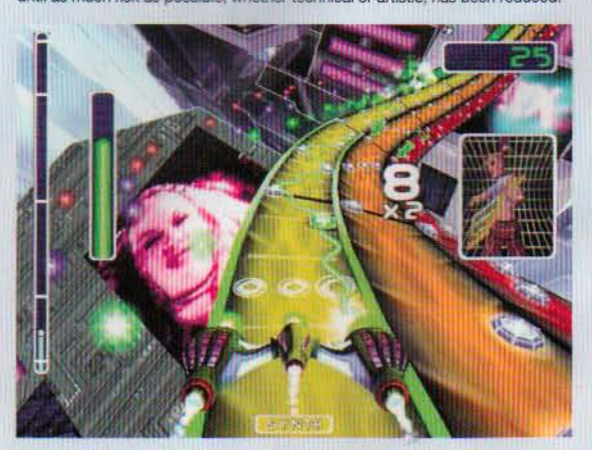
More prosaically, **Ed Bartlett**, former business development director at Bitmap Brothers reckons that one particularly good rule of thumb for pre-production is to consider giving a presentation to a publisher. "If at any point you have to say, 'Now imagine...' then you need to do more work in pre-production," he cautions.



Lessons learned from pre-production: 2
Amplitude

Publisher: **SCEE** ■ Developer: **Harmonix** ■ Format: **PlayStation2** ■ Year: **2003**

Developing a sequel should make pre-production a more straightforward proposition. But one of the crucial decisions Harmonix decided to make early in *Amplitude*'s cycle was to throw away most of the code used to create its predecessor *Frequency*. This took up the first four months of pre-production and had the knock-on effect that it took much longer to get the game to a first playable stage. It paid off at the end of the project as the game was much easier to debug. Less successful, however, was Harmonix's decision to cut the time it had set aside for art pre-production. Moving straight into production meant artists didn't share a vision for the game's overall look and so had to waste time during production trying to pin this down. Lesson learned: don't start production until as much risk as possible, whether technical or artistic, has been reduced.



Amplitude's technical risk was reduced by rewriting the code from its predecessor, *Frequency*, but the time spent on art pre-production suffered

Lessons learned from pre-production: 3

Publisher: **SCEE** ■ Developer: **Insomniac** ■ Format: **PlayStation2** ■ Year: **N/A**

It was early 2000 when Insomniac started pre-production on its debut PlayStation2 game. Codenamed I5 (for Insomniac game number 5), the team wanted to move on from the cute platformers it had been previously known for. Instead it started work on what it referred to as a dark adventure, featuring a female lead character who wielded a staff, for combat as well as for casting magic. With the game signed to Sony, early work began creating both PlayStation2 technology, as well as pinning down the character. A couple of months into the process, it became clear that things weren't going to plan. The technology was proving complex, the character didn't work and morale within the pre-production team was low. Insomniac finally managed to produce its first playable version, only for the producer at Sony to ask it to rethink the game's direction. As a result I5 was ditched and Insomniac reverted back to its old genre of action-platforming and started work on what became *Ratchet & Clank*. Lesson learned: don't be afraid to cut your losses during pre-production. Some concepts just don't work and it's better to realise that after eight months of pre-production, than 16 months of production.



Insomniac's failure to move in a new direction resulted in *Ratchet & Clank*, after the developer was brave enough to cut its losses and start again



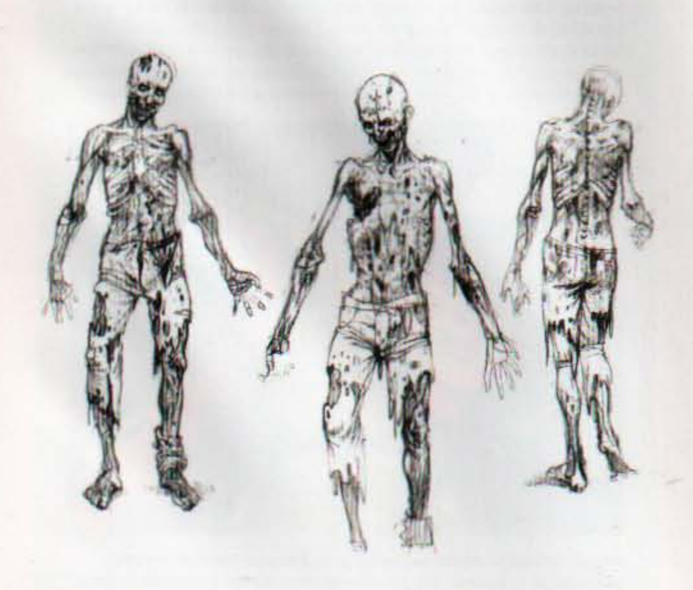
One of the problems with pre-production can be the team's desire to focus on all the cool bits. Who'd want to work on collision detection or the camera system when you can be the person to develop the slice-in-half combat animation?

Typically, pre-production should take around a third of the time scheduled for development. But while it is by necessity a time for experimentation, that doesn't mean it should be unstructured. Well managed pre-production is the foundation for a successfully completed game. And it's certainly difficult to get the latter without the former.

According to game design guru **Mark Cerny**, pre-production is vital because it's the opportunity for a developer to work out what their game is actually all about. "Developers shouldn't treat pre-production as a leap-before-you-look process," he explains. "It's the opportunity to work out character, camera and control in an environment in which you know you're going to throw away most of what you create, but by doing so you are ensuring you're not throwing away work later on in development."

One of the first things undertaken during *I-Ninja*'s ten-month pre-production phase was that the team started playing around with whiterooms. One of the developer's favourite prototyping techniques, these untextured environments are used to tweak a character's moves and test basic gameplay elements, which in the case of *I-Ninja* included the combat and movement systems. "It was a good idea to start with but caused a lot of problems later on," says Walker. Abstract by their very nature, one big trap of whiterooms is they can seduce developers away from the restrictions of the finished game, which is the very thing pre-production should be overcoming. "Something we had to deal with was because Ninja was quite powerful in terms of his moves, there was the tendency for the whiteroom to get bigger and bigger to accommodate all the cool things we were adding," says Walker. But when the team started to test their streaming technology, which removes the need for load screens in the game, it became obvious that once textured, the levels defined by the size of the whiteroom were far too memory-intensive to run at the specified 60 frames a second rate. "In the end we built a demo level, which was a small section of the game, and finished it to final standard. That taught us so much more about the game," Walker says. "I really think it's the best way to use pre-production time."

"The epiphany of pre-production is proving your concept, proving technically you can make it and proving, as far as possible, you can finish it on time and to budget"



Another recent trend within pre-production is the move to open up the process early for external testing. This also ties in with the push to get a playable demo completed as quickly as possible and certainly proved to be a breakthrough for



According to market research done during pre-production, *I-Ninja*'s cartoonish art style was a turn-off for younger gamers. As a result the game became much darker in tone

Nalin Sharma. "After a couple of years, I'd developed the game to a position where I was demoing it to people," he recalls, of the 3D shape-matching game. "I showed it to a friend of mine who's nothing to do with the industry and he just explained its fundamental problem to me. There was no way of swapping the shapes around, which really limited the game mechanic." With this pointed out Sharma implemented a juggle button, expanding what had been a fun five-minute game into something with a lot more depth. "When you're iterating between writing code and trying out concepts in pre-production, it's easy to miss stuff," Sharma explains.

I-Ninja also benefited from some professional market research on groups of children and adults. "We had a very young art style, which we thought was great because it was ironic – cute but violent," says Walker. But typically the younger players didn't like it. "They thought the name was cool, but they didn't want to play a game that looked like it was designed for 12-year olds," he explains. "They wanted to be playing the same games as 18-year-olds." The result? *I-Ninja* took a darker turn. "This is the sort of thing you have to learn in pre-production because once you start production with 40 people, you need to know exactly what you are making," says Walker. "For me the epiphany of pre-production is proving your concept, proving technically you can make it and proving, as far as possible, you can finish it on time and to budget."

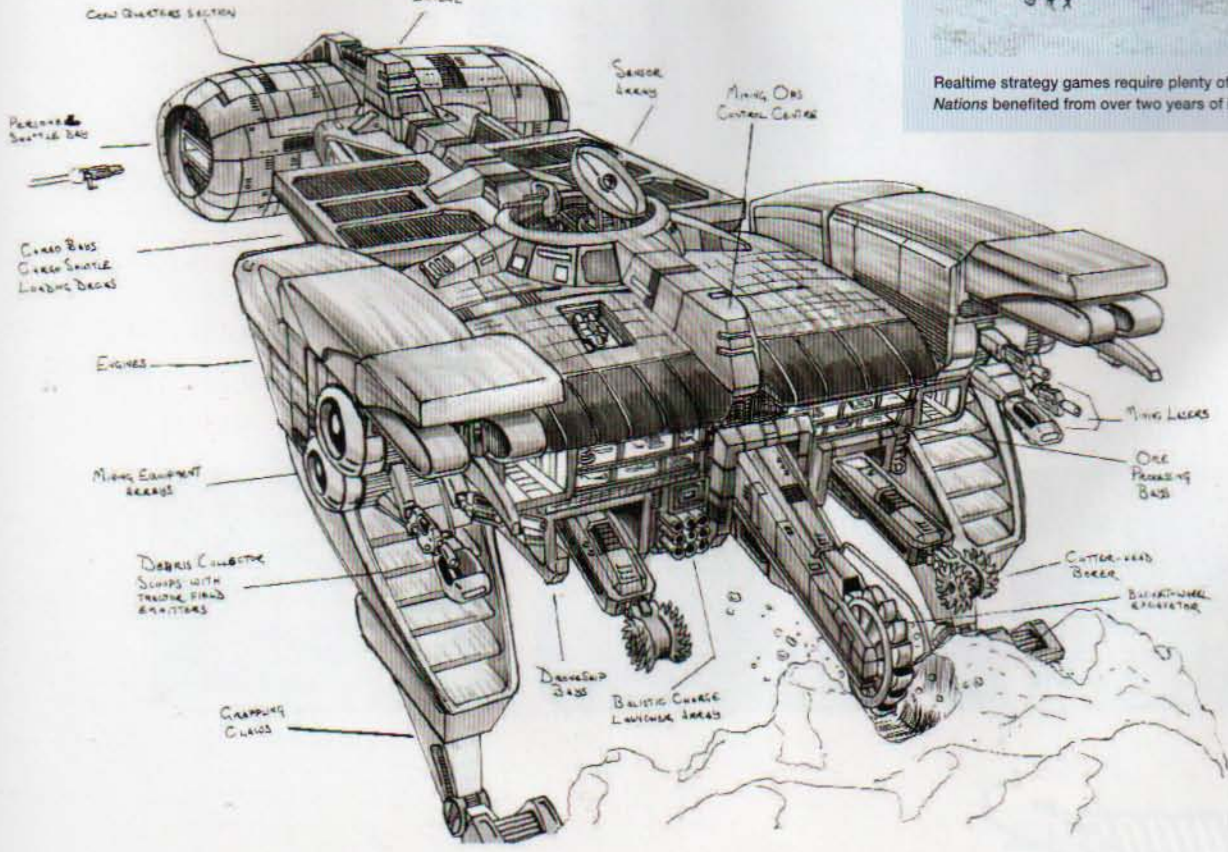
Lessons learned from pre-production: 4
Rise of Nations

Publisher: **Microsoft** ■ Developer: **Big Huge Games** ■ Format: **PC** ■ Year: **2003**

Prototyping is an obvious requirement of the pre-production process of a realtime strategy game such as *Rise of Nations*. It was particular important for Big Huge Games as *Rise of Nations* was the studio's first game after its experience with turn-based games. With a checklist of innovative features the developer thought could revolutionise the realtime genre, the first task of pre-production was to create a playable system to discover which would work and which would have to be left on the drawing board. A singleplayer testbed was up and running in weeks, while a more complex multiplayer version followed within months. With everyone on the team playing the game constantly for the two years of development, new ideas could be thrown in, tested, tweaked or trashed at speed. Lesson learned: prototyping core elements as early as possible refines the concepts, reduces risk and provides plenty of time for crucial game balancing.



Realtime strategy games require plenty of prototyping. *Rise of Nations* benefited from over two years of internal testing and feedback



Artistic endeavours

William Latham trained as an artist at Oxford University and the Royal College of Art. Fascinated by the potential of evolution and computers, he worked with IBM Research in the UK from 1988 to 1994 where he developed the MUTATOR code with Stephen Todd. In 1992, the two authored a book, 'Evolutionary Art and Computers', and gained a number of patents on their work. A year later Latham met Mark Atkinson, a games programmer then working on artificial intelligence and genetic algorithms in the banking industry. Together they founded London-based studio Computer Artworks. Its first project was the PC screensaver and design tool Organic Art, which was published by GT Interactive in 1995. Other versions followed, including the Pentium III-optimised Organic Art Deluxe, and bundled versions for Microsoft's Windows 95 and Windows 98 Plus Packs.

Computer Artworks' first game was *Evolva*. This squad-based thirdperson action PC game featured extensive artificial intelligence and evolutionary elements and was published by Virgin Interactive in 2000. This was followed in the summer of 2002 by *The Thing*. Published by Vivendi Universal, the squad-based action game was a continuation from John Carpenter's 1982 film of the same name. Released on PC, PS2 and Xbox, it's sold over a million copies and won a Game Developers Choice Award for Innovation in 2003, for its in-game trust system.

As Computer Artworks' creative director, Latham is currently overseeing five projects. One is *Tidejackers*, a game based on modern-day piracy for SCi. Meanwhile the company's Brighton studio, set up in 2002, is working on a firstparty title for Sony as well as an unannounced action adventure based on a major film studio licence.



Audience with

William Latham

creative director, Computer Artworks



You made your reputation as an computer-based artist. Why did you decide to get into games?

I had been doing a lot of research work with IBM, giving talks at Siggraph, going round the world showing Organic Art – it was very interesting but I got bored. I've always been interested in 3D worlds and it seemed games were becoming a more exciting area as PCs got more powerful. But it took a long time to build the company up to a critical mass – five years really. I was surprised by that although I think the industry is a lot healthier now than it was when we started Computer Artworks. There's a lot more opportunity and you can be more creative.

Why do think the initial learning curve was so steep?

Well, *Evolva* was an ambitious title. It had lots of innovative elements such as point-and-click commands in a 3D world so you could give orders to your squad. And on top of that you could genetically customise your characters too.

As a company we learned a lot though the experience. One of the main things was how to deal with feedback. We had people playing the game who had certain suggestions which we ignored. In fact, they were right. It taught us a lot about what elements need to go into mainstream games to make them entertaining.

I think it's a problem particularly associated with UK development studios, which are generally full of guys with PhDs. We always want to over-complicate things. *Evolva* obviously took us too long to make as well. It was an awkward time as we hadn't done PSone games and PlayStation2 wasn't around so we decided to stick with PC. At the time all the games were *Quake* and *Command & Conquer* clones.

Presumably you jumped at the chance to work on *The Thing*?

It was a real opportunity to do something mainstream. It was a great licence because we could play on the weird imagery we were well known for. We'd also learned a lot about complicated artificial intelligence on *Evolva*, which proved to be useful for *The Thing*. That was when the company really started to take off.

The challenge with *Evolva* was because it was an original title the quality needed to be better than excellent. Developing an original title, you have a much harder task convincing the consumer and the publisher it's an exciting proposition. The trick is to present them with mainstream concepts and then have some element of innovation within that. With *Evolva*, the game was 60 per cent innovation and 40 per cent what the consumer wanted.

> "With an original title the quality needs to be better than excellent. You have a much harder task convincing the consumer and the publisher it's an exciting proposition"

With *The Thing* however, we had a lot of straightforward elements people had seen in other games but with certain twists. We were far too ambitious in the early days. Now we are more pragmatic. We want to make high-quality games people are familiar with and then see in which areas we can innovate.

Do you think the industry's concentration on licenses and sequels is killing creativity?

For us to work on licences, I treat it a bit like Ridley Scott making TV adverts for ten years. He trained himself and built up his production values, and then he went off and made 'Alien'. I don't think there's anything wrong working with licences. In fact, because Hollywood is extremely demanding about the quality of licensed games, it can be good for your team. Licensees don't care if your renderer isn't finished. They just want to know why your rain doesn't look as good as such and such a game. That's the quality level you get from working on a licence. And once you've got your production quality up, then you can tackle an original title and those production levels will stick.

But aren't there too many film licences being made into games?

The film world is currently generous with licensing deals. I think that will change. Publishers will do their sums and then go through a period thinking, "It's too expensive. We better do something else." Then there'll be a shift back to original titles. That doesn't mean it will be easy to get original games signed up. Now you need to present your concept with very high production values. Typically developers have to fund a complete demo, which takes a couple of months. You can't just knock up a simple demo. After a while, of course, the film world will think, "We're losing money, we'll loosen the screws." And the whole thing will shift again.

It's often said the process of making games will become more like the process of making films. Do you think that's likely?

Yes. You can see this sort of approach happening already in terms of art resources, where you can outsource your level creation say. It's a bit like the film world where the production company can be small but you hire in the necessary resources as they are needed. It's going to be necessary considering the volume of work because development time is going to get shorter.



How much shorter?
I think the minimum is going to be 15 months. It's particularly important for film licences because by the time a title is greenlit you only have about a year, a year and a quarter at most, until the release date. In that sense, licences are setting the pace for game development. However uncomfortable developers find it, publishers are going to push developers in that direction and it will even happen with original titles.

It's not uncommon for original games to take more than three years of work at the moment though?
Certainly the whole process will need to be mature in order to people to work within a 15-month cycle. But once people have their core technology and their art tools sorted, and a strong vision for what they are doing, you will be able to pull it off. In some ways, this whole argument that original content takes a long time to create has been the developers' worst enemy because you also have the time to constantly change the game. Whereas if the concept is fixed at the beginning and your game designer can stand up in front of the team and articulate exactly what the game is about, you can sort things out upfront.

Actually, I do think a game designer should be able to stand up and literally talk their way through the game. They need to be able to say exactly what is going to happen. It's a hard thing to do, but what I've found out is it's easy to confuse the creative process with not being able to make a decision. Once you start changing things, it gets incredibly expensive. Code gets quietly thrown away. Personally I get bored easily so I'm keen on innovation but game development at the moment is a wasteful process and it's got to change.

You seem to be proposing a radical shift in the way studios work?
Yes, the whole way we develop games is going to have to change. It will become more like the film process where the first person you get onboard is a scriptwriter. Then you'll have a storyboard editor and they will work closely with your creative director or producer. The initial questions about a game will be: what's the atmosphere? What's the mood? Who's the main character? Gameplay might not be discussed for a couple of months. Previously it's tended to be this oddball process where you start with a game designer with a novel idea. Someone else has an idea and the two get bolted together. That's how you end up with games which are too quirky and there are plenty of examples of those in UK development. It can be structured a lot better. These games will be just as original as current titles but more attractive to the massmarket.

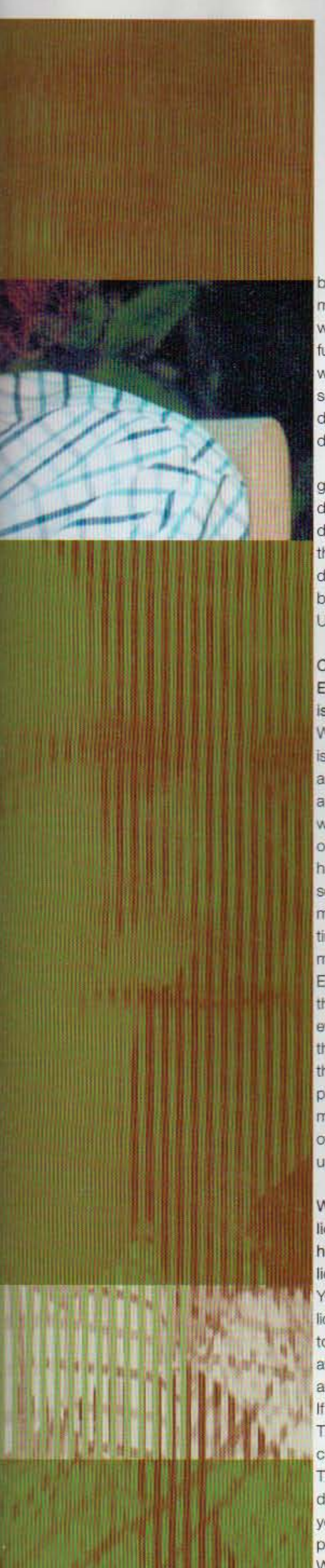
Considering your background as an artist, do you think this new way of making games will reduce the creativity of individual developers?
One of the things we're finding, as we grow, is the company environment isn't always the best for your creative people to work within. To make games, you need a slightly corporate structure, so X, Y and Z happen at the right time and in the right order. That often means things can become a bit sterile without you noticing. There seems to be a fine balance getting your organisation working well and having opportunities for people to be creative. What I'm finding is having several projects on the go gives you some of the necessary flexibility. Working on just one project, *Evolva*, was a nightmare scenario. You can't move people from team to team. You can't re-use your technology. Then you start your next project straight from your old project – it's a bit like chain-smoking. You're lighting your next cigarette from the butt of the old one.

To survive in this world as a developer, I think you need to be doing five projects. Even publishers go bust so it's the only way of spreading your risk from a business point of view. Five projects also gives you critical mass in that if you have a programmer on one project who isn't getting on with someone, you can move them somewhere else. You can fund a strong core technology team to service your project as well and have the additional infrastructure you need.



Computer Artworks has always had a strong reputation for its technology, but shouldn't you be moving over to middleware now?
In a sense, it's why you need five projects, in order to support your core tech team. I'd love to use something like RenderWare. It would be a lot more straightforward but there is cost associated with those products and once you buy them, you're relying on them. There will be time in the future when everyone uses middleware though. As an analogy I can remember in the CGI industry, all the special effects companies in Soho had their own in-house 3D modelling packages. Overnight the whole industry changed when Alias came along. Everyone saw the light, binned their code and started using Alias instead. It will happen in the games world too. It will happen when middleware becomes the obvious choice. I don't think that time has come. You can cut the argument both ways. Middleware is pretty expensive and it's not quite good enough. Can we really get into the code and tweak what we want, for example? Until those issues are resolved, it will continue to be a 50:50 choice. I think the switch will happen overnight. but people like Criterion have to work harder to make it happen.

You spoke about the influence of film-style production techniques for games so what are your thought about film-style funding?
We're involved with two film funding schemes already, actually. It's interesting because it will change the relationship



between publishers and developers. At the moment, developers can be unprofessional while publishers can be bullies. With the film funding models, you have an interim body which makes sure everyone plays ball. In a sense, they act like an umpire. To some degree, it will put a lot more pressure on developers to write better specs.

What I hope will happen is film funding groups could start to work directly with developers. It means we will be able to develop games to a later stage and then take them to the publisher and just negotiate a distribution deal. Actually this model will be a big opportunity as well as a big challenge for UK developers.

Considering the lack of strong UK and European publishers, do you feel slightly isolated from the big US publishers?

We definitely need to open a US office. There is no doubt about that. I think UK developers are losing business because they haven't got a strong enough presence in the US. The way Hollywood works is all to do with going out to lunch and just calling by. It's pretty haphazard but suddenly a deal emerges. I'm sending my producers to the US a lot at the moment and I go out for three weeks at a time because it's where the decisions are made. They won't like me saying it but the European offices for US publishers are just the messengers. Going through them can even complicate things because you pitch to them and then they have to hand it over to the US office. But the good thing is there's plenty of opportunity in the US at the moment, because a lot of the developers over there have been bought up or are tied up in existing projects.

Would you consider trying to buy up licences yourself as a developer rather than having to deal with publisher or other licence holders?

Yes, absolutely. There have been a number of licences available pretty cheap no one touched. The original 'Matrix' license was available for $100,000 for example. The thing about licences is spotting them early enough. If you leave it too late, everyone wants them. There again, licence holders are a lot more clued up about who they sell the licences to. There's definitely a Catch 22 situation developers can benefit from though. Often you'll have a licence holder talking to a publisher who's interested in the licence. What they need is a demo to show the marketing guys what the game could be like. We've been having all sorts of discussions like that and it's an interesting situation to be in because the demo is the glue which holds the deal together. The problem is if the discussion between the licence holder and publisher goes on for too long, all the development time gets used up.

This obviously refers back to your point about the speed at which developers can complete games?

Absolutely. If you're set up to make games within 15 months, when everyone has finally made up their minds you can do it. If you're standing there saying, "It's going to take us 22 months," it becomes a big problem. I think you'll have a 15-man pre-production team so you can do the demo and carry out rapid prototyping. For fullscale production, team sizes will be 35–40 people on a title. You don't want more than that because they'll end up falling out. There is a point where you can have too many people.

Are you concerned it may change when consoles such as PlayStation3 arrive?

I'm not particularly bothered in terms of the technology. The big issue will be which developers get the PlayStation3 development kit first. It will be key and there could be another cull of developers at that point. Publishers will also be taking an active interest in which studios are getting development systems. What we found last time round was getting devkit proved to be pretty important to your business. The question is whether publishers will be more centralised in their approach, concentrating on fewer external developers at the point. But as a developer, you don't want to be distracted by new hardware until someone can send you the SDK and the damn machine. Worrying about things can be a big distraction for your team. I think it's all a long way off though. Publishers are nowhere near signing up titles for those machines yet.

How big an impact do you think those systems will have in terms of the processing power available?

There will always be a limit. Even if you get photorealistic graphics, someone will build the most complicated AI system which uses up all the CPU anyway. What is important, is having much more subtle interactions within games. It's not an issue of photorealism. The key to making a scene look real is having enough incidental movement. That's what gives people the sense of the real world, not the quality of the rendering.



Computer Artworks followed its debut game, *Evolva* (top) with *The Thing* (above). The licence didn't prevent innovation, though, and the developer won a Game Developers Choice Award

One of the things we're talking about a lot at Computer Artworks is scary moments. The analogy I use is 'Alien'. The structure of that film is amazing. You're in the bowels of the ship and you know what's going to happen to Harry Dean Stanton but then you see the cat and you focus on it. When he's finally eaten, you're caught completely by surprise even though you knew it was going to happen.

In games, everything at the moment is completely obvious. The consumer wants much more than a whole load of running around. I think that in the future, games will have a lot more set-pieces – very sophisticated set-pieces. The graphics don't even have to be amazing but there will be a level of staging where you're using trigger points to launch events which get the player's adrenalin running. We can't just import techniques from films of course, but something more sophisticated will emerge out of it.


16-BIT
POWER — ON
MEGA DRIVE SEGA
04

Closer to the Heart

Blighted by a legacy of disastrous hardware, many gave up on Sega years ago. But it wasn't always this way. **Edge** delves into the history of the Mega Drive, examines the facts and finds itself in a time when the videogame seesaw tipped heavily in favour of golden software, pirate TV and an unforgettable blue mascot...

Prejudice is defined as "an irrational attitude of hostility directed against an individual or group." There will undoubtedly be those to whom the previous statement applies. Those who still feel the burn from the Mega-CD, 32X or even Saturn. But to love the Mega Drive – to understand its role – is to accept these errors, erase them from the mind and realise that, had Sega failed to take the US and never come to realise its famous blue mascot, the current videogame pantheon would be very different. Backwards compatibility, online play, analogue controllers, simultaneous global releases, urban chic and a remarkable brand strength – all were due (with varying levels of success) to Sega.

Of course, the real factors are hardware and, more importantly, software. And, arguably, this is where the industry peaked, as the finest titles by the greatest developers are all products of the 16bit era. Where the current crop of game mongers spill out their wares based on technical infallibility or photorealistic accuracy, the late-'80s and early-'90s came to represent the domain of the imagination and of a careful balance between arcade immediacy and armchair depth. But it was a slow start.

In 1987, Nintendo's NES was in its fourth year, alleged to be in one in every three US homes and with 90 per cent of the market share. Sega's own 8bit unit, the Mark III/Master System, was trailing badly, with sales of 230,000 in Europe and a virtual shunning in Japan and the US. Despite its technical superiority to the NES, a lack of thirdparty support ensured that Sega would remain the underdog.

By the end of the year NEC's PC Engine had launched in Japan, and during 1988 it would go on to sell more units than any other console. Despite being part misnomer – the machine's 16bit GPU still ran under the command of an 8bit Hu6280 CPU – the Engine's specification put it leagues ahead of the NES, introducing the first notions of a true-to-life arcade experience for the home. Sega CEO, **Hayou Nakayama**, took the potential for accurate arcade ports one step further and the decision to develop a domestic System 16 – Sega's then coin-operated technology – was cemented. Within weeks of the PC Engine arriving in Japan, Sega unveiled its successor to the Mark III/Master System, code named MK-1601, complete with a launch slot of autumn 1988. Where Nintendo had triumphed by being the first to

More is more

Sega's attempts to enhance the Mega Drive range from well-known blunders to more obscure incarnations – the former being infinitely more interesting. Some of the less ordinary peripherals for Mega Drive include the US-only Activator, an octagonal ring of infra-red sensors that the player stood within, kicking and punching moves that translated to the console. At least, that was the pitch, as many consumers complained of horrendous inaccuracies and at £60, it sank without a trace soon after release. Unbelievably, this wasn't the end of Sega's attempts at novelty controllers. Other entrants include Batter Up and Tee Vee Golf (both replica sports controllers, complete with motion sensors), Mega Mouse (two- and three-button variants), Outback Joey Exercise Bike, a link-up cable for *Zero Tolerance*, Miracle Keyboard (a $200 music sequencing peripheral), six-button joypad (specifically for *Street Fighter II: SCE* and *Eternal Champions*), AX-1E analogue pad, the Hyperscore cartridge (for uploading scores to TeleText), as well as two versions of the modem – the aborted AT&T (**E**16) and Catapult X-Band – both of which offered peer-to-peer gameplay, downloadable content and potential email. Additionally, three other products were mooted, the external 3.5-inch Floppy Disk Drive, Mega Keyboard and Mega Pad (a graphics tablet which evolved into Pico, Sega's educational toy). None of which ever surfaced, but are rumoured to exist in prototype form. Of all the above peripherals, one thing is certain – the Sega completest will need deep pockets to collect the whole set.





Ben Woodeson's 2001 exhibit, 'Altered Beast', is perhaps the most bizarre use of a Mega Drive, being powered by copper and zinc plates conducting electricity from a bath full of tomato soup. Visit his website at www.woodeson.co.uk for more information



Possibly the most effective of the Sega advertisements, 'Cyber Razor Cut' led to the character of Jimmy (Peter Wingfield) being interviewed in several magazines at the time

GENESIS DOES WHAT NINTENDON'T.

The sum of Sega's 1990 stance in a single phrase. Nintendo was catering for the family, for children and Sega took advantage of this popular perception to the fullest

launch in the 8bit era, there were those who proposed the same would be true for Sega in the forthcoming 16bit console war. A prediction that would ring particularly true.

On October 29, 1988, Sega launched the Mega Drive in Japan for ¥21,000 (£114), alongside four software titles: *Altered Beast*, *Super Thunderblade*, Yu Suzuki's popular *Space Harrier II* (an exclusive sequel to the arcade game) and *Osomatsu-kun*. It was clear that the hardware was superior to the competition, accommodating recent arcade ports with distinct ease. **Edge** spoke to **Lee Mallabar**, owner of www.videogameimports.com and **Chris Foulger**, an ex-Sega employee, now an import/export wholesaler. "I bought my Mega Drive some time in 1989 and I remember my first game being *Space Harrier II*, which utterly blew me away," says Mallabar. "It really did feel like the Mega Drive was taking gaming to a different level." Foulger agrees, having seen the console in Emap's 'Complete Guide to Consoles'. "Two reviews of *Super Shinobi* and *Golden Axe* were placed together and, as a Master System owner, those games were the best-looking titles I'd ever seen on a home system." Despite such praise, the impression made on Japanese gamers was a lesser one – in truth, it wouldn't be until the US launch that the Mega Drive would really flourish.

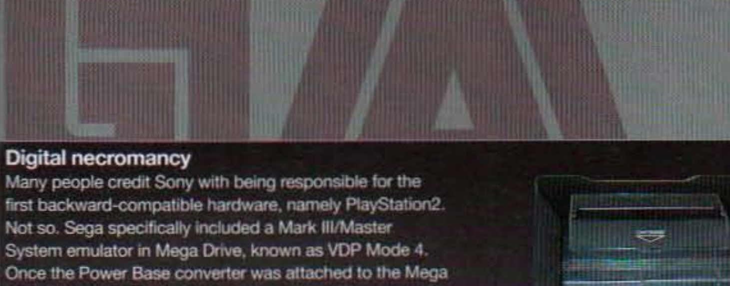
To this end, Sega president, Nakayama-san, charged the US wing of the company with a Japanese mandate: "Haku Mandai," or "Sell one million consoles". A tall order by anyone's standards. More important was the name-change for the Mega Drive. Head of marketing, **Al Nilsen**, states that there were copyright issues with the name under US law and, instead, 'Mega Drive' was rechristened 'Genesis'. Holding connotations of development, progress and, more significantly, a renaissance, Sega was making no bones about its total commitment to the console, a fact reinforced by an aggressive advertising campaign. The assumption that gamers who had joined the Nintendo camp five years earlier were older and more mature would pay off when the choice to include both arcade and sports titles in the US software launch was made. This approach, coupled with an extended thirdparty recruitment plan saw Sega ready for business, and during the Summer C.E.S. the company announced a September 1989 US debut for Genesis.

Unfortunately, US retailers didn't share Sega's



From top-right, clockwise: EA's standard oversized cartridge, with useless yellow tab; a UK example, the standard 'mushroom' shape; a Japanese cart, with rounded edges and cutaway; and Sega's *Sonic & Knuckles*, with its connector for mounting any other *Sonic* title

11



Digital necromancy

Many people credit Sony with being responsible for the first backward-compatible hardware, namely PlayStation2. Not so. Sega specifically included a Mark III/Master System emulator in Mega Drive, known as VDP Mode 4. Once the Power Base converter was attached to the Mega Drive, the latter would download the Mark III/Master System boot ROM, reset, then having detected the new boot code, runs itself as a Mark III/Master System. This ensured that Mark III/Master System owners would not be forced to scrap their entire games collection should they (hopefully) step up to 16bit technology.

Far more curiously, rumours indicate that Yuji Naka produced a NES emulator for Mega Drive, but admitted it was poor and supported only the *Mario Bros.* games. **Edge** suspects a pet project and, as expected, it never materialised.

Lastly, there are two known Mega Drive emulators for Dreamcast, both modified from Steve Snake's Gensyst emulator for PC. Both contain around 400 ROMs, but the latter is better organised. Those in possession may also want to highlight the *Sonic* ROM and press Y.





Long before Nintendo's N64 effort came the AX-1E Analogue Pad, complete with variable-rate triggers and thumbsticks. A very similar looking pad was later released for Sega's Saturn console

enthusiasm, believing instead that NEC would win the upcoming console race, as the PC Engine (renamed the TurboGrafx-16) was due to hit the shelves during the same month. The atmosphere was of complete damnation, one retailer opining that NEC was "...going to blow you [Sega] out the water." It couldn't have been more wrong.

Pay dirt

Come August 14, Sega shipped a limited quantity of consoles to the New York and Los Angeles stores, priced at $199.99 (£125). By September 15, the rest of the country received its allocations, complete with a $10 price-drop. The twinning of *Arnold Palmer Tournament Golf* and *Tommy Lasorda Baseball* with arcade behemoths *Golden Axe* and *Altered Beast* hit pay dirt and within one week, the industry figures were quoting Sega as owning 65 per cent of market share. As an import gamer, Mallabar admits that, "Once I finally got started, there was no stopping me – I fell in love with the machine and spent all my money on games. A friend and I felt that everyone was completely overcharging for their games, so we started our own company. Nothing really happened until our advert in 'C&VG', but when it hit the stands, everything went mental."

It was all NEC could do to stay in the game. Then-executive vice president, **Keith Shaefer**, offers as the cause of the Genesis' success "...inferior hardware, but [with] a superior selection of software that was Americanised for the [sic] American consumer." Indeed, there were those who claimed the PC Engine still delivered greater graphics. Certainly, few would contest the excellence par none of titles such as *Gun Hed*, *Ys Books I & II* and *R-Type*, but it was these titles' inherent Japanese qualities that kept the US game-playing public at a comparative arm's length. A slow and misguided release schedule, stiff prices, unsportsmanlike advertising and an unquestionably ugly shell did no favours for the TurboGrafx-16, while Sega had the world's first true 16bit games console, and tweaked its name, image and software for the US customer. Christmas of that year saw Sega achieve 90 per cent market share for console sales, propelling it to the overall number two slot, but Nintendo still had the greater overall user base and calmly claimed to be working on a successor for the NES. Foulger elaborates,

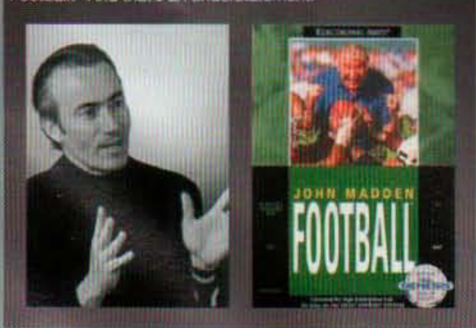


The J-Cart, Codemasters' ingenious sidestepping of the limitations of two joypad ports. By plugging extra pads into the cartridge, the player count could effectively be doubled



A sporting chance

Substantial sales of Genesis were galvanised in no small part by the marriage of the Genesis to Trip Hawkins' (below) Electronics Arts company; more specifically, its range of officially-licensed sports games, namely *John Madden*, *NHL Hockey* and *PGA Tour Golf*. Originally, EA had intended to reverse-engineer Sega's cartridges, but the threat of legal action ended with an unlikely alliance, EA being awarded the position of official thirdparty developer for Sega. Neil West refers to it as a "sweetheart deal" before going on to say that it "paid off big time, especially in the US with *John Madden Football*." And that's an understatement.





A demonstration of the gulf between UK and Japanese artwork. Cover art was tailored to the tastes of the region, reinforcing the notion that Europe is almost an afterthought in the release schedules



Two pathway cuts, four wires and two single-pole, double-throw switches. At ten minutes' work, this UK MD conversion opens up a plethora of Japanese software and is well worth the effort

"Sega was the king of the arcade and quickly became a major player in the home market, too. The timing of the launch in the US couldn't have been any better, as Sega was working with a clean sheet. The Master System was popular and the backwards-compatibility of the Mega Drive provided a clear upgrade path." Sega was now most definitely on the way up.

The next year saw Sega achieve substantial sales of Genesis software, with titles such as *Michael Jackson's Moonwalker*, *Joe Montana Sports Talk Football* and *ToeJam and Earl* proving popular by virtue of their cross-age appeal. An advertising campaign claiming "Sega does what Nintendon't", constantly reminded the US public that Genesis offered a more applicable and recent software catalogue.

During this time, SNK unveiled its monumental Arcade Entertainment System for US consumption. However, arcade-perfect versions of veritable triple-A titles were never going to justify a $600 (£379) price tag and the machine quickly fell into the realms of the luxurious curios – a status it still enjoys 13 years later. With NEC's PC Engine and add-on Super CD-ROM 2 still under-performing, the real threat was from Nintendo. Inevitably, the Kyoto giant countered Sega's front with the announcement that it would release a 16bit replacement for the NES in November of 1990. Things were starting to pick up speed.

Eager to expand on its US success, Sega pushed the Genesis into Europe, returning the console to its original Japanese name, Mega Drive. November of 1990 saw the UK release at £190 with *Altered Beast* and some 30,000 units arriving at the larger electrical shops: Dixon, Toys R Us, Rumbelows and the like. Sales were good and the steady arrival of thirdparty developers, such as Acclaim, helped solidify the name of Mega Drive as the brightest new star in the videogame heavens; *Disney's Castle of Illusion*, *Strider*, *Revenge of Shinobi*, *Populous* – the list goes on. Great software was becoming greater.

Neil West, ex-editor of 'Mega' (Future Publishing's Mega Drive magazine) highlights the importance of the Sega phenomenon: "The Mega Drive was new, sexy and foreign. Personally, it was a great time for us on the console magazines. We were surfing on the front of a huge wave, having been lucky enough to be at the right place, at



The Japanese version of the Mega Modem, boxed and in mint condition. A true rarity and somewhat slow by today's broadband standards, clocking in at a mere 12.2Kbps



Each of the four iterations (Mega Drive I and II and Mega-CD I and II) can be bolted together, but are unwieldy in anything other than the native pairing



Some of the more popular and not-so-popular Mega Drive magazines of the day. Edge is thankful 'Sega Power' had stopped putting men in leather on the cover by this point

Blue's Journey

Hard evidence proving the birth of Sonic being scant, two theories bob to the surface: the entry by Maoto Oshima to an in-house competition to design a new character and a drawing sent to Sega by a female fan featuring the then-unknown insectivore dancing with Madonna. However the arrival, none could deny that creating a blue hedgehog with red boots was a design masterstroke.

The first internal rolling demos were enough for Sega to realise it was onto something big, and the company duly decided to keep the project under wraps – even though there was a prime opportunity to show the demos at the 1990 CES in Chicago. Within a short month, the character had a name and an in-house development team (headed by a young Yuji Naka), having been charged with creating a game to rival *Mario*. Massive sales across the globe tell the rest admirably and Sonic Team would go on to guide the blue mascot (internally and externally) through approaching 90 different iterations, including the recently-announced *Sonic Heroes* (see p48). For all its success, Sony – much less Microsoft – has yet to realise such a strong brand representative, so have we seen the end of the console mascot? Ah, that's a discussion for another time...



the right time. We earned fuck-all money, but all of a sudden, people were flying us all over the world and asking us to appear on TV. We were lucky young men."

By November of 1990, Nintendo's 16bit console, Super Nintendo Entertainment System, finally arrived in Japan to a borderline-hysterical public – rumours of muggings, mass sick leave and gross under-supply go some way to back up the sentiment that Sega was never going to beat Nintendo at its own game in Japan. Meagre sales of the Mega Drive were ample proof of this and so Sega concentrated all its efforts on smashing the enemy in the US. With a window of just one year, the Stateside D-Day was set for September 1, 1991. But the US wing of Sega needed rallying and no one was more matched for task than former Mattel saviour, **Tom Kalinske**. Legend has it that he was press-ganged into joining Sega at the instruction of Hayou Nakayama, particularly after the former's rescue of Matchbox Toys from bankruptcy. A short stay in Hawaii and Tom Kalinske was on a plane back to America, the fresh blood that Sega needed to face Nintendo.

Price reduction

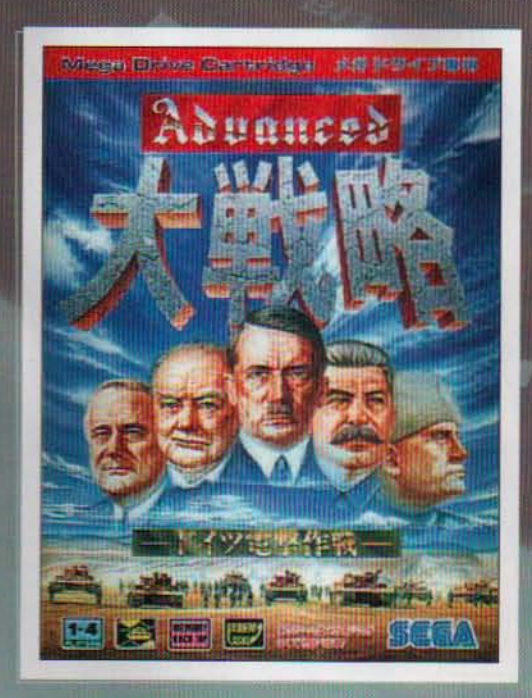
Within weeks of joining the company, the newly-appointed CEO was on the offensive, making several changes to Genesis, in particular removing *Altered Beast* from the bundle, which allowed a reduction in price to $130 (£82). Kalinske suggested reason that "...it looked like devil-worship in the Mid-West" may have been valid, but it was the $50 saving that became incredibly attractive to those gamers on the brink of a purchase. Kalinske also green-lit the construction of US-based codeshops, a previously unheard-of tactic that would raise Nakayama-san's temperature considerably. The ageing CEO summoned Kalinske to Japan and after an hour of negotiations, surprisingly agreed to support the US campaign in any way Kalinske saw fit. "It is why I hired you," conceded Nakayama-san. Sega of America was officially on the warpath.

Yet, despite Genesis' mounting popularity and a stay of execution before SNES arrived, Sega still had nothing with which to defend against the Goliath-like stature of Nintendo's forthcoming *Super Mario World*. The rapidly rising heat of 1991 required something stronger, something more

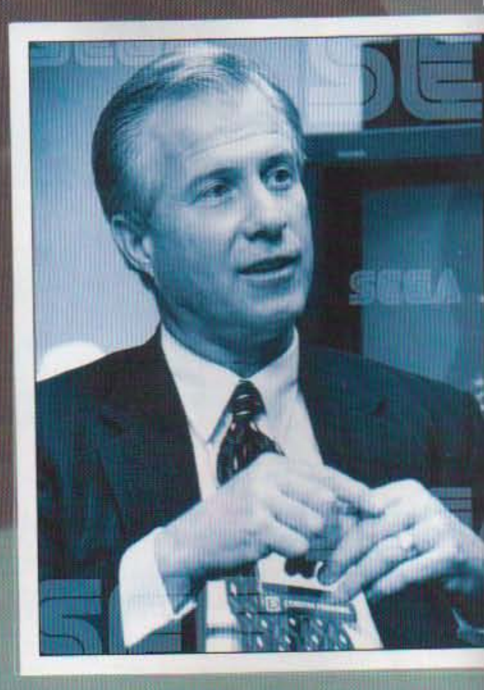
20



Sega's first comic strip proved very popular – so much so that it still exists today, publish[ed] in the UK by Egmont Fleetway Editions. Never underestimate the children's market



One of the lesser-known war sims for Mega Drive and possibly most polemic, with an intro containing digitised footage of Adolf Hitler orating to Nazi crowds. Predictably, it never saw daylight in Europe



The man who propelled Sega to pole position during the early-'9[0s] Kalinske also created the Sega Foundation, a charity that aids children with severe learning difficulties through music

System specification

CPU	Motorola M68000 16bit processor @ 7.67MHz
Co-Processor	Z80a @ 3.58MHz
Total System RAM	192Kb
Main sound chip	Yamaha YM2612 six-channel FM processor
Additional sound chip	Four-channel PSG
Colour palette	512
Onscreen colours	64
Maximum onscreen sprites	80
Resolution	320 x 224 pixels

charismatic to act as mascot for Sega's dark powerhouse. That something was *Sonic The Hedgehog*.

There are several mooted stories covering the inception of the character, but the upshot is that, upon its release on July 26, 1991, *Sonic The Hedgehog* became a success beyond the wildest dreams of Sega – with the subsequent hardware bundle leading the company to what many consider its halcyon days. West remembers the arrival of Sonic in no uncertain terms: "*Sonic* changed everything. Sega's UK marketing department takes too much of the credit for the Mega Drive's success. It was *Sonic* that did it. Everyone who saw Sonic wanted to play it and everyone who wanted to play it could; it was just run left, run right, or jump. Girls liked it, it even sounded great. All of a sudden the Nintendo looked like a kid's toy and the home computers became the domain of geeks. Sega had all the attention." Foulger adds that "Sega made gaming cool. Sony used the same technique by associating the PlayStation with the clubland generation and, wrongly, gets the credit for creating this approach."

Bitter pill

Indeed in the US, Genesis was selling furiously, often outnumbering the recently-launched SNES at a factor of 2:1, notching up sales of 7.5m units, compared to 1991's 1.6m. For Nintendo president, Hiroshi Yamauchi, this was a bitter pill to swallow, particularly after one publication had quoted a particularly spiteful retort claiming that "Sega is nothing." Kalinske's decision to pin a copy of the phrase on every door in the Sega offices had the desired effect. Numerous merchandising tie-ins, from sports sponsorship to spaghetti hoops evolved and, within a year, Sega's biggest coup emerged in the release of *Sonic The Hedgehog 2*. The first title to be shipped simultaneously around the world, Sega built up massive expectation with the now-famous '*Sonic 2*'s day' campaign, the launch date marked for Tuesday, November 24, 1992. *Sonic 2* was a triumph, reaching the height of 'best-selling videogame ever'. West confirms the popularity of the mascot, "A character like Sonic has to be a fluke, you can't plan the creation of a killer character. So Sega got a little lucky. But the gameplay came from its vast wealth of arcade experience and intimate knowledge of the Mega Drive's hardware. You've got to give Sega credit for that."



The *Thunderforce* series, a significant trio of games from a time when the shoot 'em up was king. While *Thunderforce III* was more of a landmark, the fourth instalment is superior in every respect, arguably ranking among the top three 2D shooters of all time



Sega of America's *X-Men*, with its brilliant example of how to 'fry' host hardware. At the climax of the game, the screen fills with the word 'reset'. Nothing happens until the player presses the reset button – not unexpectedly, many have never seen beyond this point



From Toaplan's horizontal blaster, *Zero Wing*, the screen that jump-started 2001's 'All Your Base Are Belong To Us' internet phenomenon. Those not having witnessed this comical example of a 'Japlish' game intro owe it to themselves to hunt it down

57 varieties of black

Aside from the three different base units, the internal workings of the Mega Drive found itself in a choice of guises, including Wondermega/Xeye (JVC's combined Mega Drive and Mega-CD with Karaoke functions), Multimega (a portable Mega Drive and Mega-CD), Nomad (a handheld Mega Drive), Megajet (a handheld unit for the Japanese airlines that plugged into headrest monitors), Mega PC/Terra Drive (Amstrad's PC/Mega Drive hybrid), Laseractive (Pioneer's Laserdisk/Mega Drive hybrid), Megatech (an eight-way arcade cabinet that played Mega Drive games), Mega-play (a JAMMA-compatible arcade cabinet with Mega Drive software on proprietary boards, similar to SNK's MVS), CSD-GM1 (Aiwa's portable CD player, tuner and tape player with facilities for running Mega Drive and Mega-CD games) and the bizarre MSX AX330 and AX990 built for release in the Arabic countries, one with a cartridge slot, the other a built-in 50-strong collection of games. Overindulgence? **Edge** has its opinions.



But 1992 also saw a dip in corporate fortunes, as several ill-received peripherals for Mega Drive saw the light of day. Menacer, a customisable infra-red lightgun supplied with an atrocious six-game cartridge died almost instantly, racking up a total of nine games – including the cart's six. Most memorable, however, was the Sony-manufactured Mega-CD, which had debuted in Japan during October of '91, then both the US and UK, the latter with its horrific £270 price tag and mostly poor software – *Lunar*, *Sonic CD*, *Thunderhawk*, *Final Fight CD* and Hideo Kojima's *Snatcher* excluded. The machine was a dismal failure and, understandably, memories of it would plague Sega through the following two generations. Foulger sums up the debacle aptly, "The Mega-CD is a worthless waste of space."

Ironically, as sales levelled out, 1993 and 1994 saw some of the Mega Drive's greatest releases, including the eventual porting of – some say the superior – *Street Fighter II: Special Championship Edition*. Konami entered the fray with its excellent *Probotector* and *Castlevania: The New Generation* and there was a re-branded, remoulded Mega Drive II and the SVP-powered, Toshihiro Nagoshi-directed *Virtua Racing* cartridge, with all its resplendent polygon power and heinous price-taggery.

The arrival of Mars, which became the disastrous 32X add-on with only a couple of decent games (*Virtua Racing* and *Doom*), plus the never-to-be-released Neptune added more doubt and confusion to even the most stalwart of Sega aficionados, shortly before Saturn debuted in Japan during November, 1994. The Mega Drive was officially superseded, but would manage to eke out an existence through a third US-only incarnation in 1997, before the terminal game release of *Madden NFL '98*.

In spite of the eventual slide from its zenith, the importance of Sega's Mega Drive can't be over-emphasised. The first console to offer true 16bit gameplay in the home, it played host to some of the grandest games to date and went on to secure the premier position in Europe and the US, a status Nintendo would never achieve. The record might be tarnished, but those willing to spit and polish, those who can still sense the excitement of seeing the blue blur for the first time, will know the Mega Drive for what it is: a pivotal slice of zeitgeist videogaming history.

The collectables

Edge met **Martin Bean**, owner of the Video Game Centre, Bournemouth, and **Simon Hales**, a Mega Drive collector of 15 years. Bean states that: "Anything can be collectable to the right person, but in my case the Mega Drive is the most collectable because it was such a great console. The artwork for Japanese games was superb and I was thankful they were in plastic cases." Hales agrees, "Cardboard boxes are a collector's nightmare, but it's almost impossible to damage a Mega Drive box through normal handling." In terms of the actual software, he goes on to explain that "there are those really rare games pressed in very limited numbers. These don't exist on machines like the Super Famicom. Perhaps the rarest and most expensive game being *Rendering Ranger* at £120. This is nothing in Mega Drive terms."

Lee Mallabar speaks about the machine specifically, "The most obvious reason (for collectability) is because the Mega Drive was relatively unsuccessful in Japan, a distant third to the PC Engine and Super Famicom. In fact, Nintendo's 16bit machine is nowhere near as collectable as the Mega Drive. If you look at the £100+ games, there are far more for Sega's machine than any other – bar, perhaps, the Neo Geo AES."



The Ooze





Japanese version: £250+
Release: 1995
Developer/Publisher: Sega
Genre: Overhead action/adventure

One of the final games to be released, *The Ooze* just made it to Japan in late 1995 and in ridiculously low numbers. PAL and US NTSC versions are worthless.

Comix Zone





Japanese version: £250+
Release: 1995
Developer/Publisher: Sega
Genre: Side-scrolling action/adventure

Again, with low a low print run, the Japanese incarnation squashes the PAL and US NTSC versions in the collectibility stakes, even without the accompanying PAL CD soundtrack.

Snow Bros - Nick & Tom





Japanese version: £170-£300
Release: 1994
Developer/Publisher: Toaplan/Tengen
Genre: Arcade actioner

All Tengen software for Mega Drive is limited, but this *Pop 'N' Tumble* clone is the rarest, having only 2,000 copies. Blame legal wrangles with Sega for many copies being pulled.

Panorama Cotton




Japanese version: £190-£320 (including tea cup)
Release: 1994
Developer/Publisher: Success/Sunsoft
Genre: Pseudo-3D shooter

The tea cup was claimed by sending in a registration card, before being entered into a random draw. The game is rare, but the cup is almost unattainable since only 300 exist

Alien Soldier





Japanese version: £100-£120
Release: 1994
Developer/Publisher: Treasure/Sega
Genre: Scrolling platform blaster

The final game from the Treasure stable to be released for the MD and a typically low print run contributed to *Alien Soldier*'s relative scarcity. The PAL version is almost as rare.

Slap Fight



Japanese version: £150
Release: 1994
Developer/Publisher: Toaplan/Tengen
Genre: Vertical shooter

More output from Tengen and a solid conversion complete with remixed MD version of the arcade game. Suffered the same fate as *Snow Bros*.

Akumajo Dracula – Vampire Killer





Japanese version: £150–£180
Release: 1994
Developer/Publisher: Konami
Genre: Platform hack 'n' slash

KCEJ eventually released *Vampire Killer* (*Castlevania: The New Generation* in the UK) in pitiful numbers. But the lower the print run, the more desirable the game.

Pengo





Japanese version: £130–£160
Release: 1995
Developer/Publisher: Sega
Genre: Overhead action/puzzler

The arcade original and a remixed version appeared on this conversion to the home system. Japanese only and small numbers drive its price up.

Eliminate Down





Japanese version: £80–£200
Release: 1993
Developer/Publisher: Soft Vision/Sega
Genre: Horizontal shooter

Soft Vision was a small developer, producing only a handful of titles. Being a horizontal scroller, this little-known title defies many collectors.

Phantasy Star





Japanese version: £150–£200
Release: 1994
Developer/Publisher: Sega
Genre: Overhead RPG

Essentially, this is the Mark III/ Master System code running on Mega Drive without the need for the Power Base converter.

Ten most important titles

Arriving at a clutch of definitive titles for any console will always test the readership. There will be those who decry the omission of *Phantasy Star IV* (the best RPG on the system), *Strider* (an astonishing port of Capcom's powerhouse coin-cruncher) or *Road Rash II* (a seminal meld of sheer arcade and home durability). Those who really know their history will seethe at *Virtua Racing*'s absence – without doubt, there is far worse software present in the selected ten. **Edge** welcomes all of this. As West puts it, "These are the games that kept the MD in the fight against Shigeru Miyamoto's output and *Street Fighter II*." Quality, technical achievement, aesthetics or sales figures may not necessarily play a part in the importance of any chosen title. But that's not to say these factors won't feature, as *Sonic The Hedgehog* alone proves. Hales quantifies the attraction of the Mega Drive in no uncertain terms, "...not everyone wants to sit through drab cinematics and dull storylines. Old school is more about 'pick-up-and-play' and completing a game in an hour. The Mega Drive more than holds its own here and is host to the purest arcade conversions ever." Maybe not incredibly relevant today, but the very crux of the matter in 1990 – as the majority of the list will verify.

Sonic The Hedgehog





Release: 1991
Developer/Publisher: SonicTeam/Sega
Genre: Platformer

The sequel was technically better, had a twoplayer mode and sold more copies, but nothing did as much for the Mega Drive than Sonic Team's dazzling original outing.

Space Harrier II





Release: 1988
Developer/Publisher: AM2/Sega
Genre: Pseudo-3D Shooter

Along with *Altered Beast*, the title that convinced Japanese gamers of the power of the black box. Ironically, one of AM2's worst games, but still a consistent attraction to MD virgins.

Super Shinobi





Release: 1989
Developer/Publisher: Sega
Genre: Platform hack 'n' slash

Proof that nothing has equalled Sega's sharp-edged series, *Super Shinobi* was a title that demonstrated the ability of the Mega Drive to exceed its arcade counterparts.

Castle of Illusion





Release: 1990
Developer/Publisher: Sega
Genre: Platformer

After a slew of arcade conversions, Sega broadened its reach with this gorgeous platformer. It remains one of the most enchanting examples of the genre, even today.

Thunderforce III





Release: 1990
Developer/Publisher: Technosoft
Genre: Horizontal shooter

Thunderforce III did everything with visceral perfection. It was so popular, Technosoft eventually ported it from console to arcade, then back to Saturn as *Thunderforce AC*.

Desert Strike



Release: 1992
Developer/Publisher: Electronic Arts
Genre: Isometric strategic shooter

Desert Strike struck a sublime balance of action, strategy, control and longevity, cementing a reputation for the decade to come.

Gunstar Heroes





Release: 1992
Developer/Publisher: Treasure/Sega
Genre: Platformer shooter

Undeniably Treasure's pièce de résistance and – no arguments, please – one of the most intoxicating videogames ever.

John Madden Football





Release: 1990
Developer/Publisher: Electronic Arts
Genre: Sports simulation

The game that sold Mega Drive to the US public. The impact of EA's patriotic and promotional tie-in with the NFL cannot be exaggerated.

Mortal Kombat





Release: 1992
Developer/Publisher: Probe/Acclaim
Genre: Beat 'em up

No game so clearly demonstrated the difference between Sega and Nintendo, whose port washed away the only reason to buy the game.

Streets of Rage II





Release: 1992
Developer/Publisher: Sega
Genre: Scrolling beat 'em up

The greatest scrolling beat 'em up for Sega's 16bit machine. Graphics, gameplay and music met to make software of the highest calibre.

Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Scores broadly correspond to the following sentiments: zero: nothing, one: disastrous, two: appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, five: average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: excellent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary.

testscreen

The world's most respected videogame reviews

Edge's most played

Wario Ware Inc

Just when **Edge** thought it was tiring of its charms, it found hundreds of all-new levels. Although it might just have been a hallucination after a run of 20-hour days.



(Game Boy Advance) Nintendo

Super Monkey Ball 2

The best party game ever created. Which is weird, because when **Edge** is ill and has no friends it can still put a smile on a flu-wracked face.



(GameCube) Sega

Super Mario Kart

Will Nintendo's newest *Kart* racer be another step backwards from the stupendous original? Beating those Ghost Valley memories is going to be tough...



(SNES) Nintendo

Amped

With summer out of the way, **Edge**'s training for its winter activities has begun. A little glitchy in places, true, but this remains our favourite snowboarding affair.



(Xbox) Microsoft Game Studios

Leader of the pack

The quest for prominence

Magic Pengel was not going to be this month's lead review, but it turned out to be an astonishing conglomeration of gameplay elements, some of them tried and tested, some of them startlingly fresh. Among the number of me-too titles and sequels you'll find following it, it was the only choice in an otherwise slow month. You think *Magic Pengel* is a weird choice? That's only because it's received little promotion and scant press coverage.

Edge likes to start the Testscreen section with the game that's going to make the biggest impact and be the most interesting, whether it be a refreshing original title elevated by dazzling visual flair (*Viewtiful Joe*) or a high-profile sequel knackered by old age and inept design (*Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness*). The score of a lead review is irrelevant. Some have questioned our decision to lead with reviews garnering low marks, a recent example being *Enter the Matrix* (3/10, **E**125), but the reasoning is simple and can be summarised in one word: 'Beware'.

So much was promised, so much money was pumped into it, so many units were shipped to retail. *Enter the Matrix*'s badness was the story of that month, just in the same way that *Magic Pengel*'s daring is this month's highlight. Watching as your doodles are transformed into living, breathing videogame creatures constitutes a special kind of experience. If you're fed up with jumping, shooting and collecting baubles, you could do much worse. Despite its lack of exploration *Magic Pengel* is delightful.

Ascribing the number of pages each review deserves is not an exact science either, but generally the game coverage reflects **Edge**'s readership. Interestingly, it was *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004* that caused the most discussion among the team this issue. If we reviewed every sports title and subsequent update, there would be little space left in the section for anything else. Yet the new *Tiger Woods* title is classy and certainly superior to the lacklustre *Mario Golf* (**E**128). It would be unfair to exclude EA's title because it's more 'massmarket'.

As a postscript, *Judge Dredd: Dredd vs Death* has not made this issue because Rebellion is unhappy with the 'review' code journalists have been given. As ever, we'll wait for code that reflects the retail version.



092

096



099





100



101

Magic Pengel: The Quest for Color

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Agetec** Developer: **Garakuta Studios** Price: **$40 (£25)** Release: **Out now (US), TBC (UK)**



Edge wants the picture book, the glorious soundtrack CD, the clothing range and, for the love of all things decent, a PAL release. Preferably under the original name of *The Scribbling Kingdom*



Defeats leech all the colour from a doodle, who jumps back into your sketchbook to recover



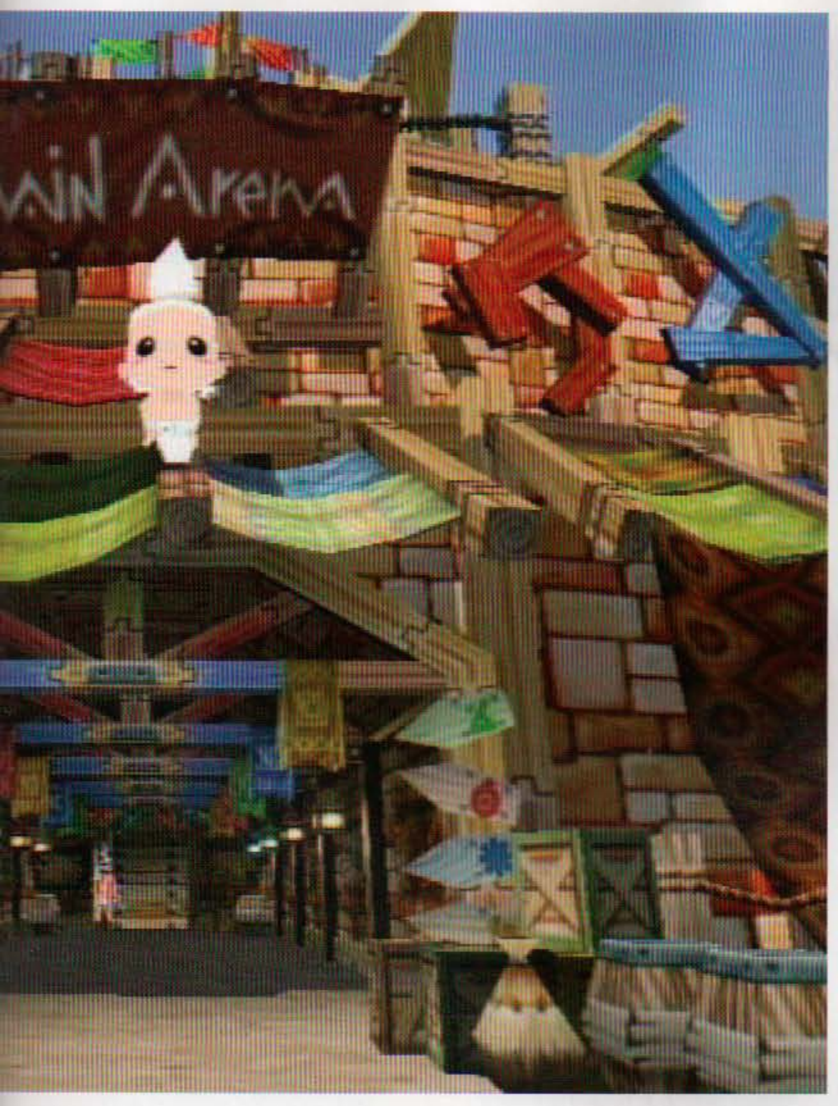
Games all too rarely let you play. Choked with missions and checkpoints and bosses, they sometimes come closer to mimicking our working lives than expanding our playtime. *Magic Pengel* is a game for playing. For playing with and in and at. Its sole purpose is to enable you to craft creatures from malleable lumps of paint, and watch in captivated delight as the game breathes bouncy, clumsy, dancey life into them.

From the pages of your sketchbook, the game intelligently animates the bodies and legs and arms and tails and horns and wings you draw, thrusting your living, breathing creation into a dazzling three-dimensional world with an audible pop. Of course, this being a videogame, the destiny of your creations is to fight, on your behalf of course, in arena contests. Success will win you more paint, more colours and more freedom.

"Magic Pengel is one intoxicatingly vibrant village, one carefully tuned battle mechanic, one infinite kit of gaming's most delicious Lego"

Once in the ring, your doodles bob and weave with furious focus, darting forward to land their blows, jumping and spinning in victory. And victory, unavoidably, leaves their opponent staggering like a drunk, feet unable to keep pace with their swaying body as they collapse, drained and limp. **Edge** came up against a fully functioning flip-book, whose constant rotation animated the tiny figures drawn on its pages. Stop and think that through for a moment. These wonders, drawn with exactly the same set of tools available to you, alert you to the endless potential offered by your simple, magical paint-set.

The drawing system seems initially very limited. Don't think of a normal painting application, with fill and erase tools. *Magic Pengel* works through a sequence of discrete body parts, which can be undone or redone but not altered once they have been created. As the game progresses you can purchase







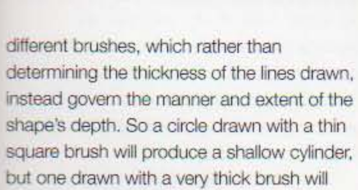






Scissors, paper, rock

Magic Pengel's twist on the ancient trinity is to prevent the use of the same move twice running. This is combined with a fourth 'charge' move which tops up a moderate amount of depth and increases damage for the next turn. Since every doodle is either a magic, attack or charge type, it is possible to gamble on the moves they are likely to favour. Magical attacks are chosen by the player, and can inflict status ailments, or prevent the use of certain moves. However, their use consumes magic points, so in drawn-out battles the more expensive attacks have to be deployed strategically.



different brushes, which rather than determining the thickness of the lines drawn, instead govern the manner and extent of the shape's depth. So a circle drawn with a thin square brush will produce a shallow cylinder, but one drawn with a very thick brush will result in something more like a sphere.

'Palette parts', which are won after each victory in the main arena, govern the animation of each shape. Draw a straight narrow tube and designate it as a leg, and the game will flex it at the 'knee' and ensure that it touches the ground alongside any other legs. Draw a gaping jaw in a head shape, and the game will not only animate it snapping shut, but will award the doodle appropriate biting attacks.

It's this feature that is the core of doodle design. Every artistic choice has a practical implication on the nature and strength of your doodle. Jaws, weapons, wings and extra limbs will change the attack options available. A fat bloated body might increase health points, but have a detrimental impact on speed. Colour choice is also crucial. Greens and blues augment magical capabilities; reds and yellows alter strength, and blacks and whites increase blocking power.

As more palette parts become available it becomes possible to further customise your



The human character design in *Magic Pengel* is of as high a quality as the doodle design. As the story unfolds you become more attached to, or hostile towards, the townspeople



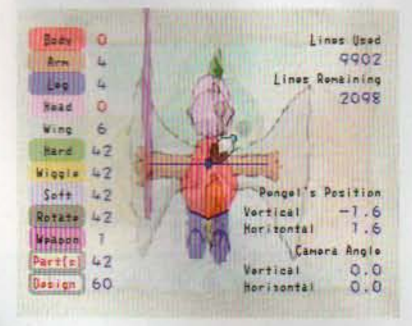


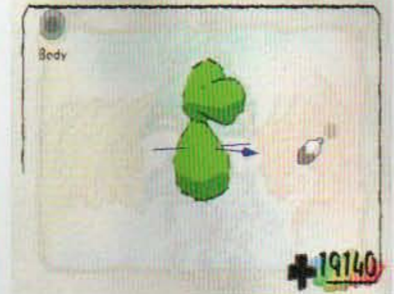
Grabbed by the Ghiblis

From the startling beauty of the intro illustrations, Garakuta's connections with the famous Studio Ghibli are clear. Ghibli provides the delicate animation which follows the game's completion, as well as contributing some of the character designs. Devotees of 'Princess Mononoke' and 'Spirited Away' may experience a painful conflict of interest when faced with a Ghibli-created doodle in battle. Should you encounter one you can't resist, you may get the chance to purchase it from the villager who owns it. Once safe in your sketchbook you can tweak and customise and treasure all you want.

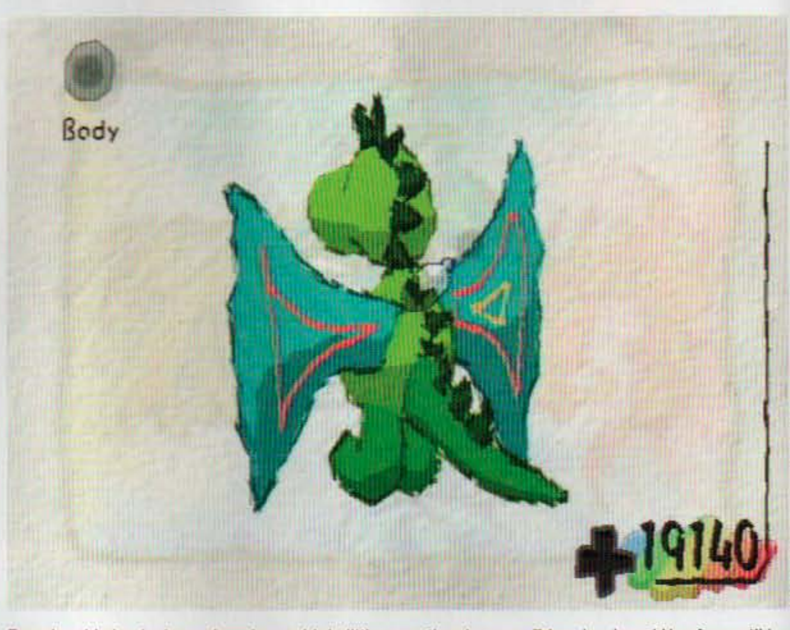












From humble beginnings where he could do little more than bounce, **Edge** developed Humfrey until he was armed with tail attacks, the power of flight and a vicious magical staff. And legs, of course

> "While there is none of the depth promised by complex RPGs, neither is there a single battle you can win simply by hammering X"





The design of the doodles is often heart-stopping for entirely unexpected reasons. Despite hours of play, **Edge** is yet to see all of the hundreds of doodles contained in the game

creation. 'Soft' parts sway gently in the breeze and make very convincing quiffs. 'Rotate' parts could be used to create a wind-up toy doodle or model atoms. 'Hard' lends itself to shields and teeth and horns.

Just typing up the possibilities is enough to lure **Edge** back to the drawing board to try out some fresh ideas. Finding the balance between how you want it to look and how you want it to be is what forms the challenge in *Magic Pengel*, and prevents the game from becoming a shambling free-for-all.

There's a plot, of course, but no exploration and little variety. You commute, endlessly, from your sketchbook, through the village (where you can challenge shopkeepers to duels and purchase brushes), to the battle arena and back again. The combat system is scissors-paper-stone – or rather magic-attack-block – with a few sustaining twists (see Scissors, paper, rock). Staleness is prevented by the subtleties of the AI, and matches are gradually elevated into quadruple-bluffing conundrums. And while there is none of the depth promised by complex RPGs, neither is there a single battle you can win simply by hammering X.

But that's it. One intoxicatingly vibrant village, one carefully tuned battle mechanic, one infinite kit of gaming's most delicious Lego. *Magic Pengel* isn't, by any stretch of the imagination, a rounded and satisfying videogame. But it is, without question, a rounded and satisfying stretch of the imagination.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Jak II: Renegade

Format: PlayStation2 Publisher: SCEE Developer: Naughty Dog Price: £40 Release: October





Nothing about *Jak II* stinks of familiarity. Whether it's platforming, shooting or flying, the variety is tuned to perfection

The sequel to 2001's *Jak and Daxter* is big, visually stunning and a technical marvel. And, although it feels utterly ungrateful to say so, none of that is any sort of surprise. The original was a landmark in PlayStation2 platforming and programming, its polish and precision setting new standards along the way. "We don't tend to go off and create entirely new forms of gameplay," the California codeshop's leader Jason Rubin told **Edge**'s **Equip** PS2 special earlier in the year. "But beware if we come into your genre, because we're going to do the best, cleanest, lightest, funnest, most balanced, best-looking game in it."

Jak II pretty much legislates and number-crunches that promise into a fact, bar one key omission: despite what Naughty Dog's crack programmers might think, you can't encode fun-ness into a videogame. Having fun is an exchange, not a one-way edict, the one crucial measure of a title's value that can only be assessed when the circle is complete and the controller is in the player's hands. Yes, there's a lot of 'fun' to be had here, but is it really more fun than the original? That's a point certainly up for argument.

Almost two years have passed since *J&D* first appeared and put so many of its peers on the platform to shame. And although PlayStation2 development across the board has come on in leaps and bounds since, the original still outshines most comparable new releases in all departments. So although those *Jak* foundations have been thoroughly extended, enhanced, embellished and expanded for this sequel, the engine room was never going to be an area where Naughty Dog would have to worry about the competition anyway. As far as bar-raising evolutions on the platform go, *Jak II* has one evident concern, and it's brought to you by the letters G, T and A.

"As far as bar-raising evolutions on the platform go, *Jak II* has one evident concern, and it's brought to you by the letters G, T and A"



The graphic style and storyline conspire to create a much darker feel for this impressive sequel

So, grafted to the friendly, well-organised platforming of the first game is a new gloomy, oppressive urban underworld. There are guns (lots of guns), entire fleets of eminently stealable vehicles and hundreds of meek civilians to unceremoniously chuck out of them. There are angry law-enforcement agents, too. But fans of the original will be glad to know that fossil fuels remain crucial. Having been force-fed too much Dark Eco by his evil adversaries in the fallout from his previous adventures, Jak mark two has developed a taste for the stuff. As a consequence, he has the option of transforming into a metallic, Hulk-like persona for brief spells during which he can wreak havoc with supercharged moves and whirlwind speed.



In his new and ruthless 'renegade' incarnation, Jak begins his adventures by tackling chores set by the city's black market merchants and resistance movements, aimed at promoting insurrection, protecting rebels, lubricating illegitimate trade routes and destroying imperial infrastructures. (Whisper it, but technically speaking, he could now be called a terrorist.) It's a process which sets the tone for both the game's new gloomy world and the mission structure which unfolds during the game.

Gone are the chance encounters and isolated tasks of the original. An overall narrative is relayed through a series of predictably elegant and ingeniously framed cut-scenes, and successful completion of each task opens up a further challenge and, more often than not, plot details. Missions can be taken on and then kept open, meaning several errands for different NPC movers and shakers can be on Jak's to-do list at any one time – and, as a logical consequence, many of the tools and talents with which Jak is rewarded en route are





One boon of Naughty Dog's mix of platforming and hub convention is that the game's levels, whether within exposed, savage wastelands or claustrophobic, man made confines, never sink to the shameless ice-lava-desert off-the-shelf level logic that functions in place of imagination in so many other platformers

Previously in E123, E125















Hover vehicles save trekking time when heading for the next objective at the other end, or beyond the walls of the central city. Many missions centre on their use, from solo scouting and shooting forays to cargo deliveries and pro races. At times the skies get 'Fifth Element'-busy without sinking into slowdown

merely helpful, rather than vital, to his overall progress in the game.

Skip the gun acquisition, however, and Jak will run out of options pretty quickly, because shooting stuff is crucial to the *Jak II* experience. Though there isn't the kind of absurd range of firearms that was *Ratchet & Clank*'s USP, there are levels in which guns are just as central. Most follow standard 3D shoot 'em up good practice, albeit with a superior sense of solidity. There are more too, in the kind of effects-intensive battles which slow so many PS2 shooters to hobbling speed, *Jak II* glides through everything at speed without breaking into a sweat. This means that the range, limit and unique advantage of weapons are often conveyed – another thoroughly satisfying touch. But for all the beefed-up combat concerns, both hand-to-hand and armed combat remains simple and largely functional.

But *Jak and Daxter* wasn't about shooting stuff and it wasn't about commandeering motorised vehicles, either. It was about updating platform logic to the PS2. Classic platform motifs are still in plentiful supply, and, indeed, some sections still play like pure, unadulterated *Crash Bandicoot*. *Jak II* attempts to extend that brief, and on so many occasions it dazzles in doing so – suddenly leaving the city streets to take flight in a hovercar is such a liberating thrill that the game begins to look like a dayglo *Halo*. As in the new *Prince of Persia*, the logic and user-friendliness of the right-stick camera is pretty much faultless, and there are other times when some will catch themselves wondering if *Jak II* is the complete, polished, style-shuffling platform benchmark *Mario Sunshine* should have been. But a couple of dozen missions in, it's the errand-boy boredom of *Star Fox Adventures* that all the travelling starts to evoke. *Jak II* is an awesome achievement, a marvel of programming and an object lesson in being as pleasant as possible to the person playing it, outclassing the genre competition on numerous key fronts

Funner, though? Probably not.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Pokémon Pinball: Ruby & Sapphire

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **Jupiter** Price: **$30 (£19)** Release: **Out now (US/Japan), TBC (UK)**

Pinball games are not meant to go on for over two hours, but that's approximately how long it took **Edge** to rack up a score of 1,120,893,455. And this mammoth game session was no freak; **Edge** is not Tommy. This provokes a dilemma... while *Pokémon Pinball* is too easy, it also remains extremely addictive. This is not a conventional pinball game with well-designed skillshots and a challenging layout, but since when was *Pokémon* ever conventional? Underneath the kiddie-friendly play fields lurks a game that will keep Pokéfans enthralled.

The catch 'em all dynamic makes it all worth it. There are 201 Pokémon to find, capture and add to your Pokédex, which can then be examined from the main menu. As you'd expect, some Pokémon are abundant, some are particular to one of the tables – Ruby or Sapphire – and some are very rare and can only be caught when certain conditions are met. The challenge of *Pokémon Pinball*, then, comes not from accumulating colossal scores, but in completing your collection.

The elusive Pokémon are caught in two different ways. An egg can be hatched by firing the Pokéball into the appropriate chute four times – the Pokémon then emerges and can be captured if you hit it twice. Alternatively, hit the 'Catch 'em all' skillshot three times and a silhouette of a Pokémon appears in the middle of the table. This then transforms into a capturable Pokémon if you hit the top bumpers enough times to reveal all the tiles.

The ball behaviour is considerably improved from the Game Boy Color version and there are more warped features to tackle. Both tables have a Pokémon Mart that, once opened, can offer anything from extra bonus games to a free Pokéball – if you have enough coinage. Travelling the Pokémon universe is ingenious; hitting the requisite switches alters the location pictured in the centre of the screen, and if you travel six times you'll be transported to a secret location where the rare Pokémon roam.

It may be less challenging than its predecessor, but there are countless secrets and hidden bonus areas to discover. While the game's generosity extends to a tilt that never locks the table and ball-saves in abundance, this remains a triumphant translation of the principles that have made the *Pokémon* world so vital.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten













Link-up with a friend and you can view, though not catch, Pokémon transferred from their cart in your Pokédex (left). Collect 60 coins in the play field and you can buy a special bonus stage in the Mart (right)



Travelling is performed by hitting the switches placed prominently on the left sides of the play field. Your next location is then determined by which loop you hit with your subsequent skillshot



Boney bonus

Most of the bonus games are fun, but go on for far too long – something not helped by the fact your Pokéball is replaced if it gets past your flippers. Here you must hit 20 Duskulls, then a Dusclops in two minutes. It's not particularly challenging, but finding all the bonus games is well worth pursuing.

Conflict: Desert Storm II

Format: **Xbox (version tested), PS2, GC, PC** Publisher: **SCi** Developer: **Pivotal Games** Price: **£45** Release: **Out now**

Previously in **E125**, **E127**









The fourplayer cooperative mode (Xbox and GameCube) works extremely well and is a significant enhancement to the main game



Live and let live

The only way you can fail a mission is to stupidly get all your men killed in one go. Medi-packs are plentiful, and should any member of your crew 'die' you can bring them back into the game by standing over their bodies and healing them. This has the unfortunate effect of making the game too easy, but it also generates further (some might argue unsporting) strategies whereby you can use your soldiers as bullet-bait. It's lots of fun, but more straight-laced gamers will probably want to try keep everyone alive at all times.







Squad-based tactical shooters are notoriously fiddly on consoles, but here a press on the left trigger plus one of the face buttons will get your squad members to fight coherently for the cause

Playing chicken with tanks is bad for your health, which is where videogames come in. The original *Desert Storm*'s best moments, and so it proves with the sequel, come about when you hear the distant rumble of caterpillar tracks and the unmistakable whirring of a gun turret moving to point in your direction. Devising a strategy for neutralising such an awe-inspiring threat is this game's strongest feature.

There are three main ways to take out a tank: with rocket launcher missiles, which are sparingly placed around the game's maps; an anti-tank mine placed in its path or a C4 charge that must be planted on the vehicle's hull. After sniping the enemy manning the tank's machine-gun emplacement, **Edge**'s favourite tank-busting tactic is to send in a couple of kamikaze soldiers (commands to your squad are surprisingly well thought out and simply executed) to act as decoys. While they are engaged in their suicidal activities, your remaining men can get into position to launch whatever armour-piercing counter-measures they have available. *Desert Storm II* throws up such moments of extreme tension abundantly, and they can also turn out to be the game's most hilarious episodes.

Of course, things don't always go according to plan. Enemy infantry may reinforce the battlefield; the tank commander may get wise and move his vehicle out of danger; a Russian-built Hind gunship may turn up and ruin your best laid plans. Pivotal has done an excellent job in improving the AI and behaviour routines, both of the enemy and your own soldiers for this sequel. A factor reinforced by the compulsion you'll get to replay missions just to see if you can tackle them more effectively the second time around.

If *Desert Storm II* has one flaw, it's that there are only ten maps and these generally channel the player down avenues rather than provide ample playgrounds for strategic experimentation. These restrictions are further compounded by the inability to commandeer enemy vehicles, something that PC gamers, in titles such as *Operation Flashpoint* and *Battlefield 1942*, have now become accustomed to. It's certainly not genre defining but played in cooperative mode with three friends (only twoplayer co-op is supported on the PlayStation2 version) it's most enjoyable – if you can ignore the moral implications of a game based on a war that has, in essence, barely ended.

Edge rating: Seven out of te

Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warrior

Format: **PlayStation2 (version tested), PC** Publisher: **THQ** Developer: **Kuju Entertainment** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**121, **E**124, **E**128

Comparisons with *Halo* are inevitable. Call it homage, imitation or rip-off, so much of *Fire Warrior* has clearly been inspired by Bungie's opus that it seems the most appropriate point to start. Unfortunately *Fire Warrior* also shows how developers can steal elements from superior games, while fundamentally misunderstanding why they worked so well in the first place.

Let's go through them in order. Weapon slots are set at two, but the player must always carry a Tau gun. However, this restriction never engenders situations where the player must make strategic decisions about weapon choice. Tau weapons are all weak, so much of the swapping will be done between the Imperium armaments in your second slot. Yet there's little evidence that weapons have been balanced, either between each other or their efficacy against enemy types. The grenades are similarly feeble, only becoming useful if a direct hit is scored as splash damage is so minimal.

Enemy types are limited and each has a different behaviour pattern, weapon and shield level. But while the AI is competent, the Imperium forces show little personality. Their movement is wholly predictable and all are vulnerable to simple circle strafe techniques. The player's automatic recharging shield does work and adds an element of tension to close combat, but it is useless against the more powerful enemy weapons and irritatingly flimsy against sniper shots from hidden assailants. The fact that there are so many health packs strewn around says it all. You will need them.

While some gameplay features may be familiar, *Fire Warrior* still has its own character and Kuju has appropriated the licence well. Environments may lack breadth and depth, but the sense that an epic battle is raging around you is conveyed expertly. The voice acting, cut-scenes and general 'Warhammer 40,000' tone is spot on. Better still are the online multiplayer games that, while offering nothing extraordinary, are technically accomplished and much more exuberant than the singleplayer experience.

Fire Warrior does nothing badly, but equally, it fails to inspire either. Those new to the joys of acrylic paints, plastic figurines and the Warhammer 40,000 universe will enjoy every minute. Those familiar with firstperson shooters will have been down these corridors a hundred times before.

Edge rating: Six out of ten









A Tau gun always takes up your main weapon slot, but these are less effective than Imperium arms. Rather than going for balance, weapons get more powerful as the game progresses



Fire Warrior uses checkpoints but they are not always placed at fair intervals. Often a difficult encounter must be tackled several times, but worse, you'll have to endure lengthy sections just to get back there



Tau petty

Tau colleagues help out in some missions but they go about their prescripted lives with little regard for your actions. Kill a couple of Imperium scum defending a barricade, and a Tau colleague will then move over to place an explosive charge on the blockage. Their clockwork activities fail to convey the feeling that you're involved in an independent working universe.

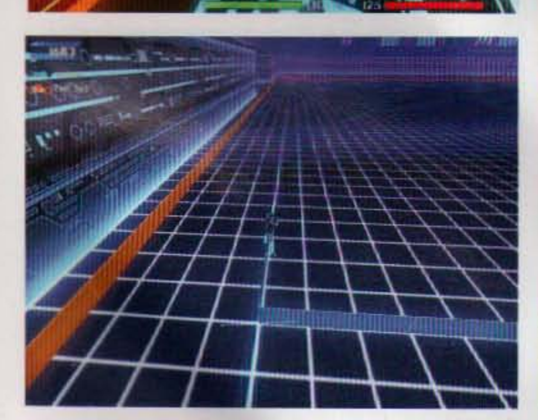
Tron 2.0

Format: PC Publisher: **Buena Vista Games** Developer: **Monolith** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now**

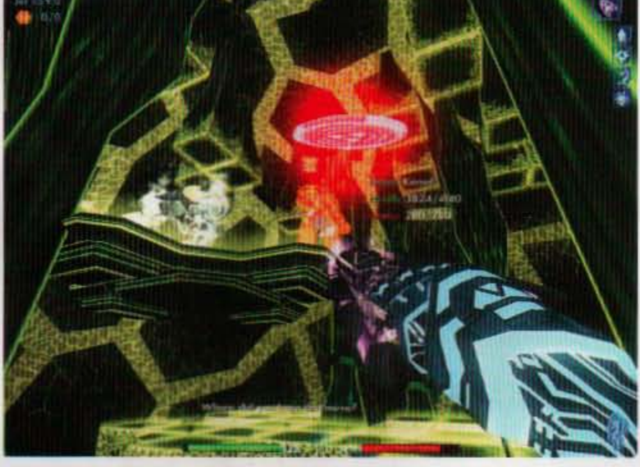
Previously in **E**111, **E**112, **E**119, **E**120

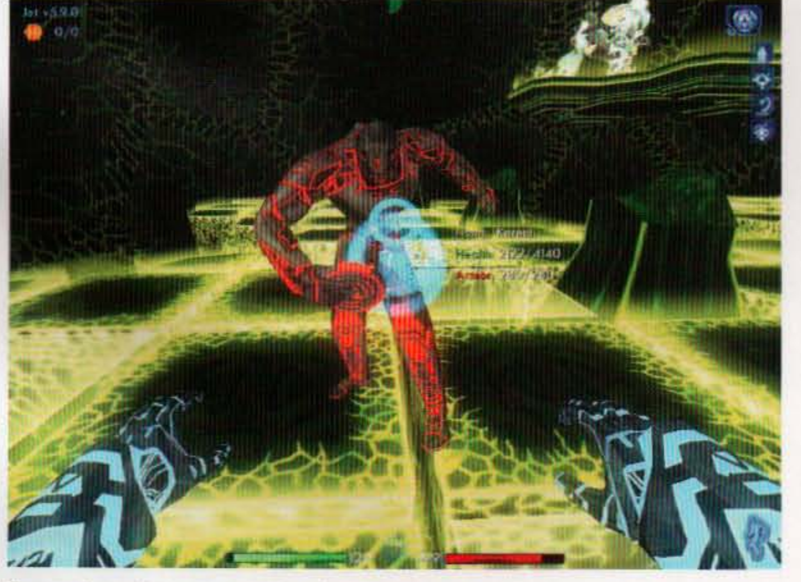






Imagine Snake played competitively, in thirdperson, with a camera and control deficiencies and you're some way to understanding the lightbike minigame





The game's graphical polish is thanks to Syd Mead, who, although probably unknown to you, is the man behind the look and feel of the original Steven Lisberger-directed film from 1982

Sudden death rarely turns out to be an enjoyable gaming experience. The fact that your character doesn't die in *Tron 2.0* – he gets 'derezzed' – doesn't make Monolith's decision to include extended sections of staccato-like substandard platform gaming any more palatable. It's a shame that the developer has tainted so much of the game by returning to an avoidable (if staple) flaw of PC game design, as players are more likely to remember the frustrations borne of such illogical design than the exhilaration of the game's wide-ranging play styles and mission goals.

Indeed the game is far from a standard firstperson shooter. Though it doesn't quite boast the sort of RPG freedom found in *Deus Ex*, it does share some traits, thanks to various skill and weapon upgrades and level objectives that range from the standard (destroy all enemies) to more esoteric types (getting a compiler's attention by getting the DJ to play a better selection of music).

Tron 2.0 is also remarkably faithful to the aesthetic and logic of the movie to which it is a sequel. In particular, the conceit of the internal life of the PC proves a rich source of inspiration. Enemies range from virally corrupted files to ICPs; emails add enticing detail to the plot (which is predicated upon a very aggressive corporate takeover) as well as revealing the minutiae of office life in the post-dotcom boom, and the action spans PDAs, desktops, network connections and internet hubs, each of which have unique characteristics.

But the game's let down by several clumsy features. For example, most weapons are unsatisfying, and while the architecture is always beautiful, it's often not very understandable – it's not always clear where switches are located, or whether a black expanse is a void or a floor. And then there are those all too frequent sections that require negotiation of moving or disappearing platforms above an enormous drop. This constant and irritating interruption is further compounded by an utterly joyless, largely random lightbike minigame that surfaces every now and again to disrupt the flow – though rumour has it these sections will be made skippable by the game's first patch.

Although these inadequacies prove more memorable than the game's positive features, dig deep enough and there's an enjoyable game. It's just that finding it sometimes proves unnecessarily arduous.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

Moore's Law

As any self-respecting PC owner will attest, upgrading your machine is essential. It's possible to pick up a variety of subroutines that enhance your character's performance, divided into defence items, weapon upgrades, and various other utilities. It's a neat game mechanic, which adds tactical depth thanks to the fact that subroutines need to be disinfected if corrupted, or ported if they come from an unknown source. Neatest of all though, is that different systems support different configurations; exploring the limited confines of, say, a PDA needs to be done with only one or two subroutines loaded.

Homeworld 2

Format: PC Publisher: Vivendi Universal Developer: Relic Entertainment Price: £35 Release: Out now Previously in E127

Establishing the difference between a sequel that does just enough to warrant a second outing and one that genuinely, justifiably improves upon a winning formula can be difficult. It's not helped when **Edge** is fond of the game in question.

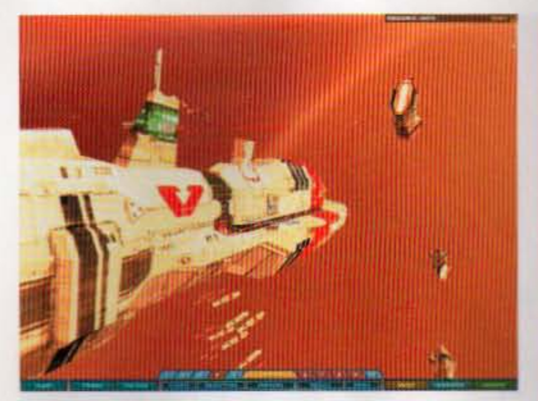
But **Edge** is almost certain that *Homeworld 2* falls into the latter camp. Relic has spent four years honing a distracting interface, revitalising a less-than-perfect control system and, above all, recreating anew the sense of majesty and scale that originally distinguished this deep-space strategy title. And if the action itself is all too similar to *Homeworld*, those whose strategy has hitherto been limited to earth-bound manoeuvres have a galaxy of treats in store.

The Higarans return as the space-faring race under your command, and a new threat forces your mothership on an unscheduled trip. Each of the campaign's 15 missions presents a well differentiated challenge, rarely falling back on the old standard of destroying a slightly weaker enemy. The three-dimensional nature of each battlefield counters space's relative emptiness in tactical terms; with probes necessary to 'see' very far, flanking manoeuvres are often effective. While resource-gathering is still a necessity, it's far from being the core focus some strategy titles force it to be.

A well-balanced technology tree rewards avid researchers and rushers alike in the lively multiplayer option, but a strict unit cap keeps hoarders from building up unstoppable forces. In fact, properly constructed combined-arms fleets are the most effective form of attack and defence, as each ship type is highly specialised. Anti-fighter frigates, for example, devastate light ships, but are vulnerable to torpedo- and bomb-equipped craft. The largest ships offer no fortress-like sanctuary, and must be protected from the swarms of bombers they inevitably attract.

Needless to say, the whole space opera is uncommonly beautiful, and not particularly demanding of the latest hardware. Injecting space with such vibrancy has done wonders for the series' appeal, though sometimes it's hard to concentrate when each missile is visible, each fighter's arc individual and foreign suns perpetually peeking through the nebulae. If *Homeworld 2*'s most obvious majesty is in its visuals, its focus on core balance, story-telling and mission design is a more dignified victory.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten









Units act intelligently in that they'll attack the enemies they're most capable of damaging



In addition to the mothership, carriers and battlecruisers can also build ship construction facilities and other useful modules. Each physical addition to a large ship is visibly added to its hull



It's full of stars

Appropriately, hitting Space zooms out to a tactical 'map' overview of the three-dimensional playing area without breaking the player's connection with the gameworld – indeed, the game can still be played from this view. Doing so gives an immediate overview of your sensors' reports and any visible enemy activity. And while the interface is overly complex with all panels showing as seen here, mastering the hotkeys will allow the reduction of all panels barring an unobtrusive strip.

Colin McRae Rally 04

Format: **Xbox (version tested), PS2** Publisher: **Codemasters** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

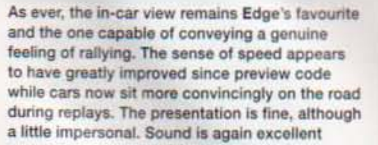
Previously in **E126**











As ever, the in-car view remains Edge's favourite and the one capable of conveying a genuine feeling of rallying. The sense of speed appears to have greatly improved since preview code while cars now sit more convincingly on the road during replays. The presentation is fine, although a little impersonal. Sound is again excellent





A great addition is the challenge-based manner in which you obtain upgrades for your vehicle during the testing opportunity that occurs between championship rounds. It certainly livens up the title's progression

At the time of writing, McRae is without a driving seat for next year's WRC having been dropped by Citroën following the sport governing body's decision to limit teams to two cars (from three). His future currently undecided, it will be interesting to see where he ends up.

In the meantime, and with the rest of this year's WRC season still to go, there's the opportunity for another Codemasters *McRae* title. It's a revised and improved affair, as you'd expect, with the major changes affecting structure and the handling dynamic. The latter is particularly evident, with a four-point system replacing the previous single axis characteristic – it's a more technical ride, and yet oddly reminiscent of *CMR2.0*, **Edge**'s favourite game of the series.

Content-wise, things have also reverted closer to Codemasters' second rally game, with a wider, more traditional selection of 2WD, 4WD and Group B vehicles available and the inclusion of familiar multiplayer modes, which should appease those who found the single-team focus of *Colin 3* stifling.

Things have clearly progressed technically, from last year's instalment, too – notice how dust gradually gathers on the windscreen in a more authentic manner, or how the detail of displayed damage has become more intricate. It all adds to the game's aptitude for complete player involvement.

Ultimately, you know what you're getting, of course. While this is the finest rally experience currently available on next-gen consoles, there's an undeniable sense of déjà vu. In that respect, newcomers to the series will obviously be at an advantage over Colin veterans – although the latter should still find the Expert mode (in-car view, manual gears, full damage) a worthy challenge.

Ironically, McRae's career predicament could be the best thing to happen to the series. Imagine what Codemasters might be able to conjure up when freed from the contractual restrictions surrounding an official WRC driver. The potential to revitalise the franchise – indeed, the entire genre – is significant and, frankly, necessary. Like F1 games, there's only so many yearly updates of rally titles the playing public will put up with.

Another excellent outing for Codemasters' rally team, then, but one that has possibly taken the series to its structural – and commercial – limits.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Chrome

Format: PC Publisher: Gathering (Take 2 Interactive) Developer: Techland Price: £35 Release: Out now Previously in E128

Somewhere, buried deep in the code for this game, there's a 50 where there should be a 30. And as a consequence, at the bottom of this page there's a five where there might have been an eight. Sometimes numbers do matter.

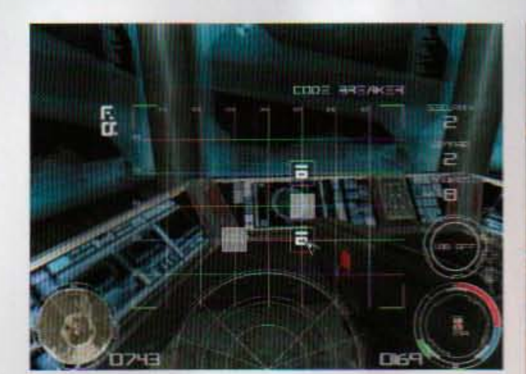
There is much about *Chrome* that is good. The levels are beautiful and organic, with a kind of varied homogeneity that makes the different moons feel related to each other without ever becoming monotonous. Character design is well above an admittedly poor average, and the range of mission objectives encourage contrasting styles of play without ever feeling too contrived. The difficulty level, though vicious, makes encountering even two or three soldiers in the open a terrifying experience.

However, there is much about *Chrome* that is bad. Sporadic boss battles are a particularly unwelcome and badly implemented inclusion. Enemy AI is pitiable, since the troops you face excel only at standing still, and much of your respectable roster of weaponry is unsatisfying and vague to use. It's a combination that means it's often unclear whether or not your shots are hitting, which inclines you to blunder out from your cover and head for closer quarters – which in turn destroys the developer's intention of forcing a tactical, cautious approach.

But where *Chrome* ought to succeed is in its Implant system – a series of nanotech upgrades that improve your aim, speed or defences. Its use is strictly limited, as an overload painfully fritzes out your vision for a second or two, making it crucial to turn them off in time. It ought to be wonderful, a well-balanced USP which augments your tactical options while making you feel like a superhero. But the numbers are wrong. It's only possible to squeeze a few seconds' use out of the implants before you have to shut them down. Recovery is miserably slow, and waiting for your gauge to drip back down to zero effectively kills any inclination to repeat the experience. Although there is an item which can be used to clear an overload, only one is provided per mission – and, unforgivably, it doesn't give an instantaneous effect.

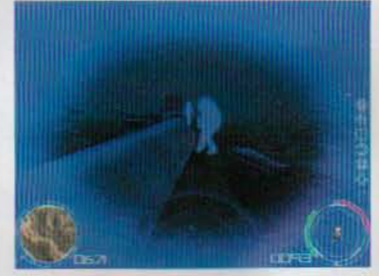
The end result is a system that many players will be happier to ignore than to exploit, and it robs *Chrome* of something which came so close to lifting it above the strictly average.

Edge rating: Five out of ten











Each mission opens with a chance for you to tool up, but your weapons cache seems oddly unaffected by the impressive armoury you lugged home from the end of the last mission



Pirates of the Caribbean

Format: **Xbox (version tested), PC** Publisher: **Ubisoft/Disney Interactive** Developer: **Akella/Bethesda** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

Bethesda Softworks' *Pirates of the Caribbean* doesn't feature Johnny Depp though it is 'inspired' by the actor's recent enjoyable cinematic outing. It started life as a sequel to Akella's mildly entertaining PC simulation *Sea Dogs*, before Disney saw the light.

This offers a similar mix of roleplaying elements, naval combat and general swashbuckling duties but struggles to get away from the essence of a PC sim stuck in the mid-'90s, albeit one that has been updated with fancy light-sourcing effects and (in the case of the reviewed version) an Xbox controller.

Navigating between the islands and wandering through their towns, jungles and caves leads to a variety of quest opportunities and inevitable confrontations. From these you obtain experience points which are then spent on levelling up your character's core pirate attributes, a reflection of the game's promised open-ended structure.

The joy in *Pirates of the Caribbean* is to be found in the variety of the elements delivered – sword fights and canon battles happily sit alongside contraband trade route management, for instance. But ultimately none offer a tremendous amount of depth.

Edge rating: Five out of ten









Random encounters consist of friendly ships, hostile ships, multiple hostile ships, and even storms. During the latter, expect to die if you haven't read the instructions

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004

Format: **Xbox (version tested), GC, PS2, PC** Publisher: **Electronic Arts** Developer: **In-house (EA Sports)** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**



Features unique to 2004 include an elaborate face editing tool, and several hundred items of clothing to play dress-up with. The lack of online play, though, is inexcusable (the PS2 version is, but only in the US while the Xbox Live service is affected by the current Mexican stand-off between EA and Microsoft)







Enter the options screen, and switch off the music, but be sure to disable your preconceptions along with that incessant chart-fuelled thrum. Despite the realistic façade of sponsors and celebrity, this is no sim.

It is, however a crisp, clean and enjoyable game that centres around the sport of golf. A simple, intuitive analogue swing performed with the stick helps take it beyond the traditional double-button press power meters of long-running stalwarts like *Everybody's Golf* and *Mario Golf*. It adds an extra inertia to your shots, and successfully so; it genuinely ups the satisfaction of nailing a powerful swing. Spin can be added while the ball is in flight, and you can bash buttons to boost your shot strength. This relaxed, arcade-like approach makes for something that's not so much about simulation, but more emulation: letting you thwack the ball with all the verve of an expert, without the worry of any homework. Fun, then, and lots of it.

It's not a graceless update per se, but the lack of online play for Xbox is jarring and demotes this to something that's not hugely different from *Tiger Woods 2003*, making it a deeply worthy first foray but not a noteworthy update.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Unlimited Saga

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Square Enix** Developer: **Squaresoft** Price: **£40** Release: **Out Now (US), October 31 (UK)** Previously in **E**115







The game's hardcore credentials form part of the US marketing, with access to the official website gained only when you've answered the question: "Are you Chicken or Hardcore?"



You may be surprised to hear that the RPG 'SaGa' series is one of Square Japan's most important, selling a staggering amount across four formats. Surprised because, as far as the west is concerned, the games have only ever attracted scorn and poor sales.

With *Unlimited*, Square makes little effort to appease the traditional western RPG fan, abolishing any free-roaming and instead setting events on a series of turn-based boardgames. Attack skills are attributed to weapon types rather than characters, so any one of your party, given enough time, can master any weapon. You receive no experience in the game and frequently fights have no obvious benefits. New skills are simply triggered randomly during battles, resulting in the confusing hit and miss levelling up that so infuriates attention deficient westerners.

You choose one of seven characters at the start of the game and, by completing mini-quests, advance the story at a faltering staccato pace. Indeed, the manner of the execution makes for tough gaming but, paradoxically, it's the exclusivity of the gameplay that will attract a few. Just don't expect the series' Japanese success to be mirrored here.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Island Thunder

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Ubisoft** Developer: **Red Storm Entertainment** Price: **£20** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**126

A theory: if there ever comes a day when **Edge** dispenses with scores permanently, then the motivation will not be whining from staff or readers, but by the evolution of gaming into unrankable online entertainment. See, *Ghost Recon: Island Thunder* is a predominantly online game, and though the game is excellent, the rules strong and the setup often flawless, how entertaining you find it depends entirely on circumstance that is all too often out of your control. It depends on other people.

Island Thunder is not, strictly speaking, a new game, but a stand-alone collection of new missions and levels in the vein of the original *Ghost Recon*. The single player game is short, mediocre and swiftly conquered, but it's online fun that will draw most people towards this, and *Ghost Recon: Island Thunder* is exactly what veterans of the original would have wanted. Which means more maps, more people camping at spawn points and more stupid online machismo. But also, with the right team, more fun. Find the right server and games can last all night, and the caveat emptor of human nature aside, endless online paintball is worth persevering with.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten









Ubisoft's decision to release *Island Thunder* at a budget price point should be praised. The game might be little more than a mission pack, but that hasn't stopped publishers in the past. And perhaps others (EA or Atari, for example) who use resprayed games to generate more profit might see some sense in doing similar. Or maybe not

Alter Echo

Format: **Xbox (version tested), PS2** Publisher: **THQ** Developer: **Outrage Games** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E125**, **E127**

While the plot of *Alter Echo* treads conservative ground, the morphing focus raises some interesting gameplay propositions. The planet is covered in malleable sentient goo, and true control of the environment could prove entertaining in a thirdperson combat game. But *Alter Echo's* terraforming is even more facile than *Red Faction's*, being straightforward pre-determined variants on key/lock puzzles which link short bursts of fighting. As well as a sword-wielding primary state, you can morph into two other forms; the thin-fast lizard-like stealth mode, and the fat-slow big-gun mode. Each has three basic attacks, and it's possible to produce creative combos by switching seamlessly between the modes.

More satisfying is the time dilation element, which flicks the screen to a representative grid and allows you to chain attacks together in a primitive rhythm-action minigame. Again that's so limited, and this is such a short game, over quickly and offering no incentive to replay. There's little thrill on the plot or its denouement. It's not that *Alter Echo* is particularly bad at anything it does, just that it is woefully timid when it comes to executing some half-decent ideas.

Edge rating: Four out of ten









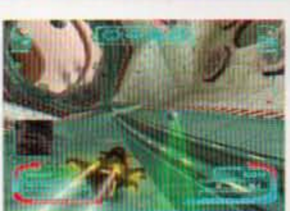
There's a fine line between graphic artistry and immaturity, and while *Alter Echo* makes an attempt at the former, it probably falls into the latter. The hues are creative enough, and the faux-naturelle structures suitably curled and alien but perhaps the real problem is that a world made from plastic would look as dull as it sounds

XGRA: Extreme-G Racing Association

Format: **PS2 (tested), Xbox, GC** Publisher: **Acclaim** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**



The tracks are wonderfully twisty and turny but the handling model is not sophisticated enough to allow smooth, accurate turning. The speed blur effect (right) looks spectacular but it punishes the player for doing well by obscuring the road ahead







There's one really good thing about *XGRA* – it's all over very quickly. Not once did **Edge** have to re-race any of the championships and by the end of it (cue unspeakably poor cut-scene) we stifled a yawn and looked forward to something better. God that's cynical, but it's also accurate. Acclaim's latest manages to tick all the required futuristic race sim boxes, except the one titled 'memorable'.

There's no denying the game has speed; hit several speed-burst arrows in succession and the scenery clips past at a distressing rate. Grace, however, is something this game lacks. Under steering the vehicles twitch erratically making it nearly impossible to perform a smooth turning arc into a corner. Weapons are similarly unbalanced – why fire paltry missiles when you can wait for the Deathstrike pickup ensuring an instant kill? There's some great course design and pleasant tunes to accompany the racing but it's mostly unrefined and inelegant.

XGRA may superficially deliver everything you'd want from a futuristic racer, but in terms of balance, satisfaction and challenge, this can only be damned by the word 'average'.

Edge rating: Five out of ten



Golden Axe

Edge takes a fresh look at a seminal game classic from yesteryear

Format: **Arcade** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **In-house** Release: **1989**

While it's excusable to equate Sega to racing games, the company has much to offer for those inclined to employ their joystick skills more extensively. Indeed, after finding fine form with its recent coin-op, *Altered Beast*, the predictable decision to develop a sequel hasn't followed and instead we have an entirely new title.

A cursory glance at *Golden Axe* shows that Sega has upped the ante considerably, graphical beauty and a wide colour palette being obvious strengths. The pseudo-fantastical setting sees you pick from three combatants (a dwarf, barbarian or Amazon) and as with most scrolling beat'em ups, each has advantages – the former tougher, the latter blessed with greater magic power.

Diving into the fray offers a welcome formula, the action coming thick and fast. Ingeniously, the standard attack manoeuvre is accompanied by several combos that incorporate the run or jump function, namely barges, flying kicks and falling strikes. These add substantial depth, giving you a choice of how to defend (or indeed, attack) when confronted by multiple foes. Choosing to play with one or two friends offer some degree of strategy, too, as the three characters make for a formidable team.

The innovation doesn't stop there: Sega has included a magic system that can be built up by collecting dropped pots from passing imps. The more the gauge is filled, the more devastating the result once the force is unleashed. Either way, every magical strike makes for grand viewing, as huge swathes of colour and light sweep across the screen, obliterating all in their paths. Learning when to unleash magic becomes important, especially against some of the larger bosses lurking at the end of levels. Unfortunately, it's equally possible to lose precious health or magic tokens while the party sleeps between stages, as the imps attempt to retrieve their lost goods.

It's hard to argue with *Golden Axe*'s charms and although the gameplay holds fewer and fewer surprises as it advances, playing as Sega intended – short and sharp – is no bad way to part with ten pence. Just keep some on hand for those inevitable continues.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten





Riding captured enemy mounts is a choice way to even the odds (top). Magic spells increase in power relative to the amount of potion pick-ups



Retrospective

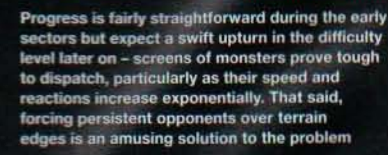
With numerous incarnations over several years and platforms, *Golden Axe* remains a trend-setter as far as the scrolling beat 'em up is concerned. Smooth, bold visuals, simultaneous play as well as several gameplay innovations – riding the enemy's steeds, for example – makes for an immediate and gratifying example from Sega's arcade heyday. Rudimentary by today's standards, certainly, but to the emerging Mega Drive, *Golden Axe* was the perfect argument to pick Sega over Nintendo.











Progress is fairly straightforward during the early sectors but expect a swift upturn in the difficulty level later on – screens of monsters prove tough to dispatch, particularly as their speed and reactions increase exponentially. That said, forcing persistent opponents over terrain edges is an amusing solution to the problem







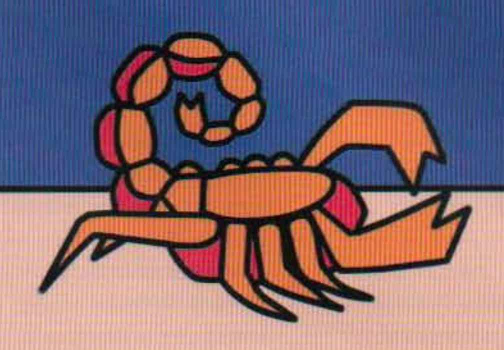
The making of...
Pitfall!

Before Lara had even developed habits of a raiding nature, one man created an exploration game that revolutionised the action adventure and crammed a whole lot of game into a ridiculously small amount of space. This month **Edge** unearths a real gaming treasure...

Pitfall Harry is stuck in the jungle. He's racing through, swinging from vines, jumping on alligator heads, grabbing treasures and looking for shortcuts. For **David Crane**, the creator and programmer of *Pitfall!* (one of the first Activision games for the Atari 2600), the hardest part of the game wasn't avoiding the scorpions or coiled snakes, it was trying to jam a lot of game into only 4K of memory.

"I loved the technical challenge of designing games on the 2600," says Crane of Atari's first console unit. Crane and fellow game developers for the much-loved 2600 were more than aware of the restrictions they were dealing with. They would have to write an entire game, complete with graphics, gameplay, sound effects and all the scoring in just 4096 bytes. You could hardly let your imagination run wild with that kind of memory size. "A lot of the game features in those days were not what you could think of, but what you could actually achieve." At that time, Crane's complete design philosophy was to first think of a clever and original technical achievement and then to build a game around it.

"The 'little running man' was really the technical hurdle," says Crane. "If you think back to the state-of-the-art



Original format: **Atari 2600**
Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **David Crane**
Origin: **US**
Original release date: **1982**



videogames of the late-'70s, there were very few attempts at animated figures in games. You controlled tanks, jet planes, *Pong* paddles, etc, because the limited number of display pixels severely restricted the creation of smooth animation. I had developed a realistic-looking human character in 1979 before I had a game idea that needed one. The difficulty was coming up with a game that made sense to have a little running man in it." For three years, Crane tested the character in different scenarios such as a 'cops and robbers' game, but it didn't work and was therefore shelved.

The running man

In 1982, while he was between games, Crane finally decided he would figure out a game for the 'little running man.' "I sat down with a blank sheet of paper and drew a stick figure in the centre. I said, 'Okay, I have a little running man and let's put him on a path' (two more lines drawn on the paper). 'Where is the path? Let's put it in a jungle' (draw some trees). 'Why is he running?' (draw treasures to collect, enemies to avoid, etc). And *Pitfall!* was born." The man became known as Pitfall Harry. "This entire process took about ten minutes. About 1,000 hours of programming later, the game was complete. In that era we said we spent 90 per cent of our time writing the last ten per cent of the game."

It's no surprise that the film 'Raiders of the Lost Ark', which was released in 1981, influenced the design of *Pitfall!*, but there was another apparent nod to 'Tarzan' with the presence of the swinging vines. But not so obvious were the introductions of the alligators. "I remembered from deep in my childhood a pair of cartoon characters (Magpies) called Heckle and Jekyll. They had a sequence during which they would run across the heads of alligators, barely escaping the jaws. I thought that would make for an interesting sequence in the game."

"Crane became one of the first programming superstars. Pitfall! clubs, thousands of members strong, sprung up everywhere and the game sold $50m wholesale"

Jaws of death

Leaping across alligator heads turned out to be Crane's favourite aspect of the game. "The first time you crossed the alligators you did so by carefully waiting for the mouths to close, jumping onto the closed mouth, tapping the joystick to move over to stand on the forehead, and waiting until the mouth opened and closed again before moving on. But once you got really good you could sail non-stop across them by exactly aiming your landing to hit the forehead of the first alligator and immediately jumping again to the next one."

Creating this enjoyable sequence in the game required a small programming tweak. In the original design of the game, to jump from one alligator head to the other the player had to move the joystick and jump at exactly the same time. "This proved to be almost impossible to play. So I changed the code to allow you to direct Harry's jump to the side, if you moved the joystick within a small instant from the time you pressed the button to jump. From a programming standpoint this was a tiny change, but it changed the gameplay from nearly impossible to an easily learned skill." It was this design decision, and many others influenced by other programmers, that made Activision games such as *Pitfall!* so much fun. "It was all in the tiny details," says Crane.

"The world of Pitfall Harry is a circular path 254 screens in circumference. The game ROM contains only 4Kb of memory, so there isn't enough memory to hold both Harry's graphic frames and the definitions for 254 screens. I solved this problem on *Pitfall!* by creating an algorithm that defined every screen mathematically. The actual definition of the entire world took less than





Over 60 games later, David Crane is still producing titles and still as enthusiastic as ever about the state of the videogame industry and its future

50 bytes of ROM."

The subterranean path dramatically changed gameplay and it worked as a shortcut. You would travel three screens underground for every one screen above ground. But the shortcuts weren't without risk as *Pitfall!*'s subterranean world was littered with scorpions. Crane liked the split between the two worlds so much that he forced the player to go below ground to collect all the treasures. "It's this kind of tweaking that raises a game from mediocrity," he says.

Flicker-free Harry

Cram too much action into a 2600 game and characters start to flicker. It was often the case when an arcade game was translated for home use. For example, *Pac-Man* has five objects – four ghosts and one Pac-Man. The 2600 could only display two objects. Such a forced conversion to the 2600 guaranteed flicker.

During the early days of Activision all their games were original concepts, not home versions of arcade games. Developers were not forced into situations where they had to create a certain type of game to fit within the 2600's fixed platform. By not forcing themselves into a corner early on, Activision games didn't appear short of expectations (ie, no flicker). "If you design a game to work within the limitations of a severely limited machine, you're going to make a game where people don't realise how limited the machine is," says Crane.

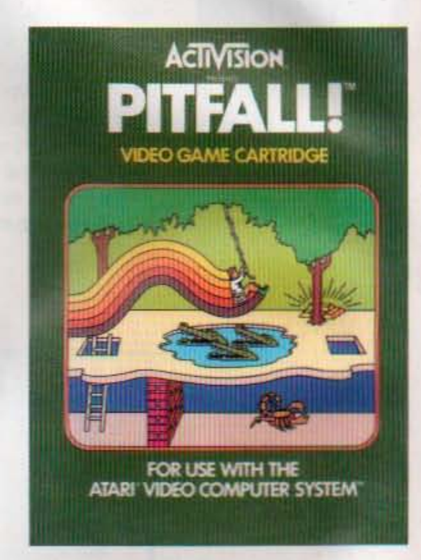
To create enemies Crane played a gentle balance between what could be drawn by the machine and visually interpreted by the player. Drawing characters on a piece of paper, objects went in if they were easily recognisable and didn't eat up too much memory. For example, Crane successfully drew a coiled snake, but wouldn't even attempt a whirlpool. It would be far too complicated. "Each thing you see in there was the result of a lot of work to determine whether or not people could tell what it was when you put it in the game. There was a lot of trial and error."

Game of the year

In 1979, Crane and some fellow programmers left Atari to create their own company, Activision. They wanted to continue designing games for the 2600, but were tired of the lack of credit Atari gave its programmers. Activision decided that its sales model for games would be like that of book sales and so they marketed both the title and the author. Each game included the name and a photo of the designer. If gamers liked a particular developer's game they would eagerly seek out the next game he created.

The model proved successful. Crane became one of the first game programming superstars. *Pitfall!* clubs, thousands of members strong, sprung up everywhere. The game sold $50m (£31.2m) wholesale, received thousands of fan mail, and was game of the year in '82, spending 64 weeks on the Billboard charts as the number one selling game. The game spawned a sequel and a Saturday morning animated series and in both 1983 and 1984, Crane was named Designer of the Year by the American magazines 'Video Game Update', 'Video Review' and 'Computer Entertainer'.

Thirty years of game programming and 60 games later, Crane still can't stop. In 1995, Crane co-founded Skyworks Technologies (www.skyworks.com), a company that creates advergames, marketing websites that use sponsored videogames to pass along an advertising message. Instead of looking to the new consoles which required 10–20 people and one or two years to develop a game, "We came to view the internet as the latest videogame system, and with limited bandwidth this new 'game system' is more like the systems of the past." He still loves his work, and consumes himself with whatever project he has, sometimes working 18 hours in a given day. Whenever Crane is asked to pinpoint his favourite game, he always responds, "It's the one I'm working on right now."



Versions and updates of *Pitfall!* have appeared on practically every home system ever released. The latest, *Pitfall Harry*, will be out on Xbox, GC and PS2



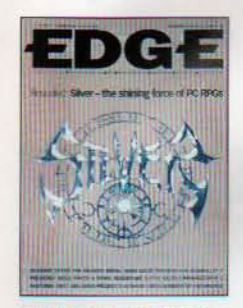
You could argue that *Pitfall!* was one of the major influences behind the classic coin-op *Hunchback*, which was released the following year. You could also argue that both were classics in their own right...

RESET

Where yesterday's gaming goes to have a lie down

reload

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 64, November 1998

"Some day all magazines will be made this way..." ran a single page advert for futuregamer.com on page 81 of **E**64. Discounting the fact for a moment that the futuregamer.com domain is long expired, and that (thus far) the internet has only really damaged the circulations of publications substantially more adult than this one, **Edge** hopes that day never comes. It'd miss the cover stock, for a start. **E**64's was silver-backed card, promoting – wait for it – *Silver*, subject of a feature with the too-smart-title, "All that glitters is not gold".

There was a lot more inside the card covers, though, including short features on the decline of the arcade industry, the rise of the emulation scene, and the grand designs of the Nuon. ECTS 1998 also warranted a mention, and Out There's increasingly tongue-in-cheek reportage contained a two page spotlight on Sony's show party, complete with industry digs and in-jokes... you had to be there, really. **Edge** also saw the trade show as an opportunity to gather six of the industry's leading lights together for the second year in a row. "I think if we all wanted to be really wealthy we wouldn't be doing this," claimed Jez San. "There are plenty of easier ways to make a living." Well, the dotcom boom *was* just around the corner...

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?
"The little of it that **Edge** has heard indicates a worrying similarity to mid-'80s soft metal (the distant rustle of letters from Whitesnake fans is already in the air)" – **Edge** indulges in some big-hair baiting with its comments on the *Sonic Adventure* soundtrack

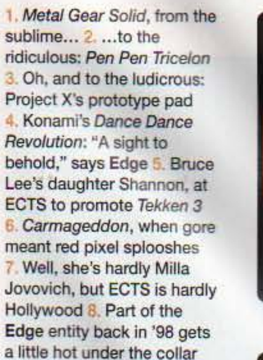
DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?
"That's it. You played it for 30 tortuous hours and then one of the main characters popped her clogs and it was bad." Peter Molyneux sums up *FFVII*'s emotional appeal

TESTSCREENS AND RATINGS:
Metal Gear Solid (PS, 9/10); *Grand Prix Legends* (PC, 9/10); *Parasite Eve* (PS, 6/10); *Spyro the Dragon* (PS, 7/10); *V2000* (PC, 8/10); *MediEvil* (PS, 7/10); *Duke Nukem: Time to Kill* (PS, 7/10); *Gunbarl* (PS, 6/10); *The Unholy War* (PS, 6/10); *Tenchu: Stealth Assassins* (PS, 7/10)


1


2




3


4


5


6

7


8


9


10

1. *Metal Gear Solid*, from the sublime... 2. ...to the ridiculous: *Pen Pen Tricelon* 3. Oh, and to the ludicrous: Project X's prototype pad 4. Konami's *Dance Dance Revolution*: "A sight to behold," says Edge 5. Bruce Lee's daughter Shannon, at ECTS to promote *Tekken 3* 6. *Carmageddon*, when gore meant red pixel splooshes 7. Well, she's hardly Milla Jovovich, but ECTS is hardly Hollywood 8. Part of the **Edge** entity back in '98 gets a little hot under the collar 9. Sensible's *Sex, Drugs and Rock and Roll*, "a point and click adventure for the mature market" 10. Sega's *Ocean Hunter*: the sharks get smart on a Model 3



Communicate by post:
Letters, **Edge**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW
Or email (stating 'Inbox' in the message header):
edge@futurenet.co.uk

I am quite sure that I will not be alone in asking you why you decided to leave *Doom* out of your top 100. You found room for, among others, *Gunstar Heroes*, which is obviously a personal favourite of **Edge**'s – but is it one of the top 100 games of all time? Are you honestly saying that from the whole history of videogaming *Gunstar Heroes* is going to be remembered more fondly than *Doom* by the majority of people?

Doom has given us so much more than *Gunstar Heroes*, which is just another example of a competent side-scroller – certainly not ground-breaking. Before *Doom* there was *Wolfenstein 3D* and little else in the genre. Since then we have seen the FPS truly explode onto our screens, leading to various advances in gaming technology – including network gaming.

If your list had been simply '**Edge**'s 100 Favourite Games' then I would have no cause for complaint, but according to page 65 of issue 128, you have tried to "determine the best games of all time." This must surely include *Doom*. To say otherwise is to be typically pig-headed, and frankly it's this arrogance that infuriates many readers, myself included.
Ted Forsyth

I enjoyed reading your 100 best games feature, and seeing how it compared with the one in **E**80, but it seems to me that your decision to shoehorn the games into groups of ten by genre created more problems than it solved.

For instance, your assertion that the term FPS is unhelpful may be true, but this leads you to suggest that *Halo* and *Ikaruga* are actually the same type of game, which seems a bit of a stretch. In addition, your decision to effectively lump two genres together has led to the omission of some terrific FPS games, most notably *Deus Ex*, *Half-Life* and *Doom*.

In contrast, your decision to include Rhythm Action as a full category is baffling. This genre has a very short history, and boasts a tiny number of games, suggesting that the ten entries here must have more or less picked themselves. No doubt the originality of Rhythm Action games was what swung it for you, but I think five games from this category would have been enough.

On a separate issue, how can you justify the fact that half of these games come from the last three years? This seems a little short sighted, which is something I would not have expected from **Edge**. A case in point is the inclusion of *Resident Evil 0*, rather than the classic 1996 original to which it is heavily indebted. You seem to suggest that the most important thing is how a game plays today, and not how significant it was upon release. The original game created an entirely new genre, but the GameCube version has better graphics. Take your pick.

Finally, what are *Viewtiful Joe* and *F-Zero GX* doing in there? As you point out in the reviews, both have some fairly significant shortcomings, and they were both released very recently. How can you be objective about a game's merits without the benefit of hindsight? I suppose if you'd compiled a list five years ago, *Turok 2* would have featured prominently, but time has not been kind to it. For this reason it would surely make sense to suspend judgement on these games.
Gavin Woodworth

Great to see some of the classics in the latest issue. *Super Mario Kart*, *Street Fighter II Turbo*, *Warcraft II*; all good stuff. But, I must express my criticism for your exclusion of what is probably one of, if not the most defining platform game in history. *Jet Set Willy* (or it's predecessor *Manic Miner*). Cast your minds back to the wonders of the mighty Spectrum, and the joys of such games as *Jet Pack*, *Sabrewulf* and *Halls of the Things*! Surely your ranking must take in to account not only enjoyability of play but also the impact on the gaming industry as well.
Alex O'Brien

Number of games in **Edge**'s best games of all time list: 100. Number in that list published by EA Games, the largest thirdparty publisher in the world: 1. I think that speaks volumes.
Alec Weldon

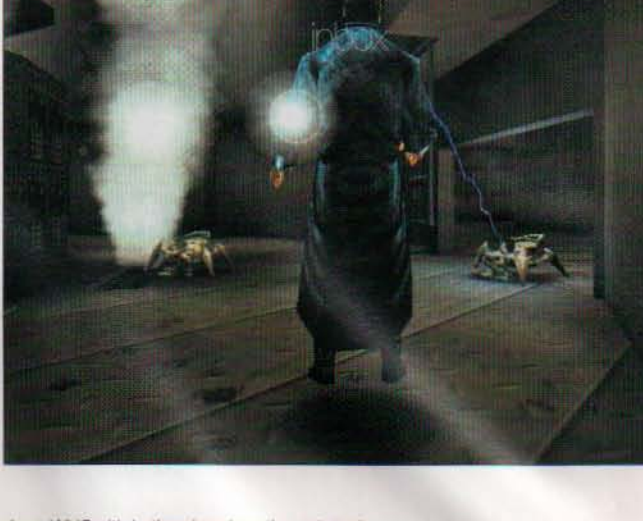
What's all this shunning *Half-Life*, eh? Now, I know that personal opinion counts for everything, which is why I shan't criticise you for not giving the game the 10/10 it deserved back in 1998. But surely it deserved a place in the Top 100. *Half-Life* is still the single greatest emotional experience I've ever had playing a videogame, and let's not forget that it totally revolutionised PC gaming, the way *Doom* had done five years before. Like I say, it's all to do with one's own opinion, but still, if it's not the 'Citizen Kane' of games, then it's got to be the 'Godfather'. Or maybe 'Star Wars'.
David T Heslop

I have just finished reading the Ten Top Tens and on the whole I agreed with the majority of your choices, but I do have a few gripes. Where is *Metropolis Street Racer*, for instance? It hasn't even been included as a finalist. *The Final Fantasy* series is similarly noticeable only by its absence, represented only by *Final Fantasy Tactics*, which, if memory serves me correctly, was never actually released in the UK. I was hoping please for an explanation as to why you saw fit to leave these out of the list and yet include such average pretenders as *Phantasy Star Online* and *F-Zero GX*
Kimahri ronso

As a relative newcomer to your magazine I turned eagerly to your Ten Top Tens feature, awaiting with great anticipation your thoughts on my favourite genre, the adventure game. But my excitement turned to horror as I discovered that your selection somehow managed to overlook almost every single one of my favourites, despite the fact that they are all generally perceived to be classics.

There isn't a single game from LucasArts, the company perceived by most to be the most important adventure game creator in the world,

"Number of games in **Edge**'s best games of all time list: 100. Number in that list published by EA, the largest thirdparty publisher in the world: 1"



and only *Sam & Max* got nominated. What about *Day Of The Tentacle*, or the four *Monkey Island* games? The series is perhaps the most loved and celebrated series of adventures ever created, and you didn't even give one of them a nomination!

My favourite game of all time, *Grim Fandango*, also failed to get a mention. I fail to see how you can justify including an action game like *GTA: Vice City* in your list, a game that arguably doesn't have a single puzzle, and totally ignore the classic games that are regarded by most people to be the very games that define what an adventure game is.

Vassili Christodoulou

I have never written to anyone about a review score or an editorial comment because opinion is something that seems to be severely lacking in this industry of ours, and as consumers we should encourage it at every opportunity, not lambast it with fanboyish fervour.

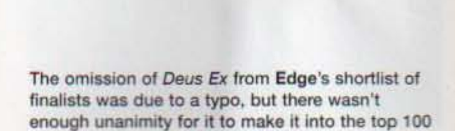
But I have felt 'compelled' (the fanboy's favourite word) to do so on the subject of the Top Ten Shooters of All Time. Should **Edge** have split 'traditional' shooters and FPS shooters? I would have preferred that, just to draw more attention to the former, perhaps my most beloved genre. Anyway, that is a moot point – the two were not split and I understand your reasons for not doing so.

However, of the 'traditional' shooters included I think that you have made an extremely poor choice. We could argue for ages over whether *Giga Wing* is better than *Giga Wing 2*, but that's totally irrelevant considering the hundreds of shooters that surpass them totally. And here comes the name that you have expected to hear since you started this paragraph: *Radiant Silvergun*. In no way, shape or form is *Ikaruga* better than *Silvergun* (except, perhaps, aesthetically), but *Giga Wing*? I'm sorry, but a shooter that is *impossible* to complete without dying is surely fundamentally flawed.

I truly hope that the omission of *Silvergun* was either a) a typo, b) an attempt to spark a fanboy backlash (how ironic) or c) a very unfunny joke.

I am sorry to be part of the backlash that I am sure you will receive over what, on the whole, was a very interesting set of choices.

Jude Salmon



The omission of *Deus Ex* from Edge's shortlist of finalists was due to a typo, but there wasn't enough unanimity for it to make it into the top 100

Unsurprisingly, many of the letters that arrived in time for this issue's Inbox were concerned with **E**128's Ten Top Tens feature. Any such list will inevitably cause a certain amount of controversy due to the omission of personal favourites, or the inclusion of particular bugbears. But the list of 100 games presented last issue were drawn up according to a very simple set of criteria. They were, simply, the ten games that the current editorial team enjoys playing the most, across the ten genres that make most sense.

Consequently, the historical significance of each game just wasn't considered. Instead, our decisions were based on how enjoyable the games are to play today – which is why a game like *Resident Evil 0* was included instead of the PlayStation original, and why games like *Viewtiful Joe* and *F-Zero GX* were seen fit for consideration. In the particular cases of games such as *Deus Ex* or *Half-Life*, in spite of their undoubted excellence, there was simply not enough unanimity among the editorial team regarding their quality compared to the games that did make the final list (although we did intend to include *Deus Ex* as a finalist in the RPG section, before a gremlin threw a spanner in the works).

As for the genre definitions, **Edge** simply felt that these should be based on what it is that players actually do in a game; in both *Ikaruga* and *Halo* (for example), the main activity is the acquisition and elimination of enemy targets. Still, all such feedback was positively received.

Has it really been this long? Ten years ago, I boarded a plane to Washington DC for a holiday with my parents (being the tender age of sixteen, I wasn't speaking to them – much like Harry Enfield's character, Kevin). I picked up **Edge** 1 from WHSmith in the airport on the outward journey and it did something special; it kept me reading. Even though I had my Game Boy with me on the plane and I just kept reading. In fact, I think I read the whole issue twice, because the depth of the writing and the level of technicality presented was like nothing I'd experienced.

Once I arrived home, I started the realisation that games were not mere objects I bought off of the shelf, but a genesis of passion and creativity brought together by a team of talented people.

Ten years on and I'm working hard within the games industry – an industry I doubt I would have joined had I never picked up that first issue of **Edge**. Now I'm bitter, cynical and (probably) twisted. I still buy **Edge** each month, but now I complain how it's got worse, how it's now full of adverts and how the scores are all wrong (especially for *The Getaway* – the last game I worked on).

So then, Happy Birthday **Edge** and have a great next ten years... you bastards!

Max Harvey

I've never written to **Edge** before, probably because I haven't had anything interesting to say. And I still don't. So I'll just settle with being one of the many readers that will inevitably write in this month to congratulate you on your tenth birthday.

Thanks for making me grin uncontrollably from ear to ear this morning as I realised just how great a time it is to be playing games. And indeed, to be reading about them. I'll admit that I wasn't 'elite' enough to be an **Edge** reader back in 1993, but you can guarantee I'll still be smiling on your 20th. Thanks.

James Marijeanne

Edge would simply like to thank the many readers who were kind enough to send such words of praise following our tenth anniversary last issue.

I was interested to read the **Edge**

"In no way, shape or form is Ikaruga better than Silvergun. I hope that its omission was either a) a typo, b) an attempt to spark a fanboy backlash or c) a very unfunny joke"





The issue of whether or not to have review scores refuses to go away. But it's (again) worth noting that a score of ten does not equate to perfection

presents **Equip**: PC edition, but wondered if you were aware of a strange mutant creation on page 101? It refers to a certain 'Jerome Ansell' as lead programmer on *Rome: Total War*. Now there is myself on the one hand, Jerome Grasdyke, and I am indeed lead programmer on *Rome*, and then there is Tim Ansell, who is The Creative Assembly's managing director. I was tempted to shout "it's alive!", but that would be a flagrant untruth as I've never seen this curious half-breed wandering the corridors at CA. No such person exists. So hopefully this sets the record straight.
Jerome Grasdyke, Lead Programmer
The Creative Assembly

Oops. Sorry.

A *Metroid* score of 214 on *Wario Ware*? Be honest **Edge**, did you use a GBA Player and a turbo button?
Christopher Buxton

Edge would like to make it clear that **Edge**'s *Metroid* score was performed without any mechanical assistance, or indeed under the influence of any stimulant stronger than caffeine.

With reference to Jake Michie's letter in **E**126, I have to stand up and give some support to testers. Although the tone of his letter was questioning rather than accusatory, it does highlight a common misconception that testers are daft.

Until recently I worked as a tester for a very large (originally European) publisher, and have worked on a great many games. A couple of these games were instant number-one sellers despite carrying serious flaws (as Jake and many buyers would define them).

When you consider that testers will work on a single game for months and months, guiding its progress through to gold disc stage, you will hopefully understand that there are very few in released games which have gone unnoticed by the testers.

Some bugs such as the *TimeSplitters2* footfalls, will almost certainly have been noticed at an early stage by a keen tester, and assigned an importance by a producer. As the project progresses, the tester will become sick of discovering that an apparently simple issue such as this has still not been addressed. Sadly though, it is often touches like the SFX for footfalls that are crucial to the quality feel of a game, which are implemented last. And as such they are the first to be brushed aside in order to finish on time.

Testers have been known to take furniture to joypad in violent fits of sleep-deprived rage upon discovering a bug has been signed off by a producer whose main concern is a concrete shipping date. If a game doesn't crash, then once the deadlines start banging on the door, bugs will be renamed as 'features' or simply ignored in order to make a street date.

These are the most frustrating bugs to discover and rediscover week after week. These are bugs which go some way to creating the recent feelings expressed in **Edge** about the lack of interest in new games. These are bugs which prevent a good game becoming great. These are the bugs which testers joined the industry to eradicate, and they find themselves to be powerless. They aren't daft, they are simply not trusted or listened to when financial risk or deadlines come into play.
Adam Taylor

After reading the Perfect Ten article in **E**128, I started thinking about why people still regard a score at the end of review as a sign of how close to perfection a game is? You're right to say that a 10/10 review isn't indicative of perfection, because advances in technology will always make it possible to improve the gaming experience. But as far as I'm concerned, this view does not go far enough.

As Ed Bartlett says, it is impossible to make a perfect game. This is just as true as it is with any other form of art. We all know it. When we see reviews in magazines dealing with other media, the score at the end is simply one of recommendation within the genre. Yet we still see review scores in gaming mags as a guide to perfection; not of recommendation. We need to set the record straight now. People need to stop whinging about why games like *Halo* and *Gran Turismo* get a score of ten. For me, a review score of ten means that even someone who detests the genre will probably get a kick out of the game, and that's all.
Joe Law

Scores in reviews seems to be a highly emotive subject, given the continuing discussion it attracts, with some preferring to read the review and make their own assessment, and speaking out quite vocally and quite compellingly.

What I think those people are overlooking, though, is that most people read reviews with one question burning in their minds. A single question that is the whole focus of the entire mag, in fact: "Is this any good then?"

Without that magic digit at the end, the reviewer is ducking the responsibility of providing an answer – endangering the relevancy of the whole process. When I read a review I want to know about the highs and lows, and how they feed into the experience of playing the game or watching the movie or listening to the music.

Reviewers must have the courage of their convictions, to be able to get to the bottom line and make a clear and definitive statement about the quality of a game. There is no room to wriggle or weasle out of a single number; it is a firm and clear qualitative assessment – and one that throws the rest of the review into the proper context. It is invaluable.
Iain Howe

If there's one debate that has been consistently aired over **Edge**'s ten year history, it's the review score debate. Review scores are currently set to stay. If that changes, rest assured, there will be plenty of warning.

> "Testers have been known to take furniture to joypad in violent fits of sleep-deprived rage upon discovering a bug has been signed off by a producer only concerned with a shipping date

Next month






AGES


NOVEMBER 2003
£4.00
future games
The first choice for gamers
9 771350 159038
11
gamesradar.com